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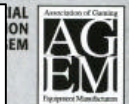
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After success with helping tribal casinos and fielding many calls for operating advice, Gary Green has started his own company.

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**PROFILE: GARY GREEN, SOUTHERN DUTCH GAMING
ROMERO AWARD WINNERS**



Colorful and controversial, Gary Green ventures out on his own

BY MATT CONNOR

Gary Green is not shy about trumpeting his success. With Barnum-like vigor, the gaming veteran informed the world, via press releases, commercials and interviews with the media, how he increased tribal revenue by 53.4 percent at the Absentee Shawnee's Thunderbird Wild Wild West Casino in Oklahoma over the last year, and EBITA by 71.6 percent during his tenure as general manager at the Trump 29 Casino outside Palm Springs, Calif.

Widely-reported statistics like that brought a flood of phone calls from casino operators, developers and money men interested in finding out just what magic Green was working at the properties he was managing.

"Coming off of the successes at the former Trump property in Southern California and the things we were doing in

Oklahoma, we started getting a lot of calls from the people in the industry asking questions about how we did what we did," Green said. "How is it that we brought \$30 million to this tribe in Oklahoma? One day, just on a lark, I started counting the calls to determine how much time every week I spent answering peoples' questions. The first day that I started counting calls, I had, I think, 23 calls come in just to ask me questions."

It occurred to Green—then president of Absentee Shawnee Gaming Enterprises—and Thunderbird Wild Wild West's assistant general manager Frank Haas, that they were giving away an awful lot of free advice that they might actually use to launch their own enterprise.

"We were sitting in the Four Seasons in Las Vegas one day when we realized that with all of the calls we had been

getting, we really were kind of like unpaid operators for these other properties," Green said. "It appeared we were doing it as well as or better than a lot of other operators out there. We figured there was a market for a company that would advise operators as to how to operate successfully or manage properties or develop them or all three."

Conveniently, the idea for the new company took shape at a time of transition for the Absentee Shawnee tribe. An election campaign was being waged, and the previous administration, which had worked hand-in-glove with Green and his staff, was on its way out.

"There was a tribal election at Absentee Shawnee and a change in leadership," Green said. "People we had worked closely with were out of office. We thought it was time to make a change, anyway, so we created our own company."

But his departure from the Wild Wild West Thunderbird casino seems to have left a bad taste in the mouth of the new tribal governor, Larry Nuckolls, who announced that there was a criminal investigation against Green and Haas almost immediately after taking office.

Charges and countercharges

"I talked to the FBI yesterday, and they said there's no investigation going on against anybody except the new governor," Green said in late July when asked about the controversy.

In late June, Green told the *Daily Oklahoman* newspaper that he has no idea what Nuckolls wants to investigate. "It's silly. He's silly," Green told the paper, adding that the casino "is being run by someone [Nuckolls] who's under indictment."

According to the *Oklahoman*, criminal complaints of perjury and invasion of privacy were filed against Nuckolls in tribal court two days before the election. Those complaints allege Nuckolls provided false testimony about how he obtained a computer disk containing Green's campaign strategy.

The invasion of privacy complaint alleges Nuckolls, with help from the casino's former computer expert, tapped into Green's work computer to obtain the information. During a telephone interview in late July, Green made no bones about the fact that he supported the other candidate, Kenneth Blanchard, for governor. But

his election "strategy" was apparently never utilized. Just the same, Green's undisguised support for Nuckolls' opponent clearly did not sit well with the newly-elected governor.

"Honestly, the way I look at this is, this kind of thing happens every couple of years with some tribes," Green said. "Some tribes decide they want to run the casinos themselves or they want to put in their own people. Then a couple of years later it happens again. He [Nuckolls] got extremely miffed when we [Green and Haas] left and said he was going to launch an investigation and 'turn the casino around.'"

Part of Nuckolls' efforts to turn the casino around was a change in the property's marketing approach. Over the course of his career, Green has emphasized a marketing strategy that personalized the casino by giving customers a dominant human face in print ads and TV commercials. Most often that face has been Green's, who had placed himself on dozens of billboards advertising the Thunderbird

Casino during his tenure there. This, too, led to a rift between Nuckolls and Green.

"It was a marketing campaign purely for Gary Green," Nuckolls told the *Oklahoman*. "It was not a marketing campaign for our tribe or even our casino." He added that at least \$300,000 was paid to one marketing company to promote the property.

But it's hard to argue with a strategy that, Green said, increased casino revenue by 59.1 percent, allowing the tribe, for the first time in its 18 years of gaming, to issue two per capita payments to tribal members.

Defining the 'magic'

Clearly Green—and Haas, his business partner—are benefiting from the big numbers Indian gaming is currently generating. Just days after the Absentee Shawnee election ushered in a new administration, the two men formed Southern Dutch Gaming, a Las Vegas based casino management and development company.

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Hands off

Tribes seek to isolate their gaming enterprises from tribal politics

Gary Green's troubles with the new Absentee Shawnee governor go to illustrate the pitfalls of linking one's career to a single individual in tribal government. Tribal politics have, on many occasions over the last decade and a half, undermined the positions of individuals in non-tribal casino leadership positions.

Green, however, said those kinds of situations are slowly becoming a thing of the past.

"I have seen more and more progressive tribes are moving their cash cows—their gaming operations—into corporations that are shielded from tribal politics," he said. "The more sophisticated tribes are learning that they need to do that to protect their revenue source for their tribe. Otherwise they're on a roller coaster."

He added that no Native American group is completely immune from internal political strife, but some are taking steps to insulate their gaming operations from reservations' changing political landscape.

"You see this with tribes all across the country. You have one tribal administration and the gaming operation is flourishing. Then another administration comes in and the gaming operation drops down," he said. "Four years later there's another election and the gaming operation moves back up. Some of the more sophisticated business-oriented tribes in the country, like the Ho-Chunks in Wisconsin and the Osage in Oklahoma and the Cherokee Nation, they've moved their gaming operations into tribal economic development corporations that are shielded from tribal politics."

"I think you're going to see more and more of that happen, because tribal gaming is not a bunch of rinky dink bingo operations anymore. It's big numbers."

—Matt Connor



Green said the company is currently looking at two potential purchases in Nevada, two management contracts for Native American casinos, and the operation of one Latin American casino.

"Do you know what the 'magic' that people keep calling to ask me about is?" Green asked rhetorically. "There's no hocus-pocus. One of the things is that we're very hands-on. I have some very Gary-centric rules. For example, any general manager that is not on the floor of the casino every day with the players—knowing who the players are, talking with the players—needs to go out the door. Management from the very top all the way down needs to be very hands on."

Another "Gary-centric rule" is that blackjack dealers have to know how to count cards, Green said.

"At any given time, I should be able to walk up to a Blackjack dealer and say, 'What's the running count on that deck?'" he said. "And he ought to be able to tell me. He ought to be that involved with the players."

Overall, Green's business strategy, he

said, involved "a combination of hands-on management, of customer service, of heavy targeting, of branding, that's really what makes it work. That's the magic."

Green said he learned that "magic" from some of the major players in the industry, including Donald Trump, Steve Wynn and Bill Bennett. Creating his new company, he said, was "all part of a grand fantasy I had beginning in 1999 or 2000."

"At that time I was working for a software company in South Florida and that was in the direct marketing area. I had left gaming for a while and was riding the dot-com boom. One of my sales guys got a call from Mirage. They were looking for a way, at that time, to sell reservations and such online, which, at the time, was pretty revolutionary," Green said. "I flew out to Vegas and was talking to a guy in the IT department, and in the midst of this meeting, Steve Wynn walks in. Wynn listened to our meeting for about five minutes before turning to me and saying, 'Yeah, but what are you going to do

about my player tracking problem?'"

"He outlined to me, very briefly, the state of player tracking at the time. It blew me away how archaic player tracking at casinos was, compared to the rest of the technology world. So I did some work there and then went on and did some work for Mandalay. From there I started doing some work for the late Bill Bennett, who really became my mentor and my driving force in business."

Bennett is the kind of colorful, towering figure that the industry is sorely lacking today, Green said.

"The real tragedy of our industry, if there is a tragedy, is that the mad geniuses of our industry are all gone," he said. "Other than Wynn and Stupack, they're all gone. Those were the guys that would take the chances and break the molds and try to do something new and different out there."

"We're trying to do that—not nearly at the grandiose levels of those other guys—and it works. So it seemed just natural to create a company that would do that." **CJ**

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