

Jan Jones Blackhurst: Las Vegas Story
by Max Enos

Speaking at the 2015 World Knowledge Forum, former Mayor of Las Vegas Jan Jones Blackhurst shared her success story and her vision for the future as the Executive Vice President of Caesars Entertainment.

A diverse audience of teachers, investors, professors, students, and journalists, totaling roughly sixty people, gathered in the cozy “Ruby Room” of the Shilla Hotel to hear Ms. Blackhurst speak. In lieu of the impending Caesars Entertainment expansion to Incheon, South Korea, Ms. Blackhurst also focused on the benefits that such integrated resorts provide for local communities.

Over the past twenty-five years, Caesars has shifted focus from mere gaming to full-blown, integrated resorts. These resorts include restaurants with celebrity chefs, top entertainers, convention and meeting centers, exclusive retail stores, and, of course, hotels and hospitality. Ms. Blackhurst noted that people will be surprised to learn that “Seventy percent of revenues come from non-gambling activity.”

Ms. Blackhurst further detailed that these revenues will quickly improve the welfare of local communities, and that they far outweigh the risks. In Las Vegas, integrated resorts have accounted for massive population and job growth. Vegas was forced to react rapidly to keep up with infrastructure; however, Ms. Blackhurst stated that a “foreigners-only” Caesars in Incheon would be a different venture, and it will not represent Las Vegas culture. Instead, it will adapt to Korean culture and offer entertainment choices such as K-Pop concerts, traditional Korean hospitality, and Korean food. Although Korean residents will not be able to gamble, they will enjoy the plentiful non-gaming amenities. With regards to infrastructure, Ms. Blackhurst said, “We had to build everything in Las Vegas...Incheon already has (the infrastructure) in place.”

However, gambling is a taboo subject in South Korea, so Ms. Blackhurst focused on busting commonly held myths about “integrated resorts”. First, she focused on the customer stereotype. “Myth: Gaming customers are less educated, low skilled, poor, and aging,” she stated first. She responded, “Near half of casino visitors are college grads.” Another myth: Integrated resorts employ low skilled workers. Ms. Blackhurst asserted that there are over 200 unique careers with “hugely high tech jobs available in the gaming industry.”

What is needed for Caesars Palace to become successful in Incheon? Ms. Blackhurst stated that Caesars has a corporate code of commitment that focuses on community, employees, guests, and the environment. They also have employees with the title “Responsible Gaming Ambassadors.” These workers are trained to identify proper gaming and how to identify troubled gamblers. “They monitor addiction and work to prevent it,” Ms. Blackhurst explained.

During the question and answer session, Ms. Blackhurst got laughs from the crowd by saying, “I think people say ‘integrated resorts’ because they don’t want to say ‘casinos.’” Blackhurst detailed her future goals and made a point that may not be apparent to those with male privilege. Her goal in the community and at Caesars is to achieve income equality between the genders. It is something she strives to provide, cares deeply about, and argues will generate much more revenue for the community. This was a strong point to make, given the deficit of women speakers at the three-day forum.

Overall, Ms. Blackhurst’s lecture was to say that Caesars Palace in Incheon will provide jobs for South Koreans, boost the economy through an increase in tourism, and work with local government to make agreeable regulations. “We hope to open in early 2018,” she concluded.