

## Investing in People

Interviews with top women executives from MGM Resorts International



**Cynthia Kiser Murphey, President and Chief Operating Officer, New York-New York Hotel & Casino**

**EDITORS' NOTE** In her current position, Cynthia Kiser Murphey is responsible for overseeing all aspects of operations at New York-New York Hotel & Casino. Prior to her current role, Kiser

Murphey was Senior Vice President of Human Resources for MGM Resorts International. A long-time leader in the company, Kiser Murphey was part of the Human Resources team that opened The Mirage in 1989. Furthermore, she joined MGM Grand's team in 1992 and managed all Human Resources activities related to the property's opening. Kiser Murphey earned bachelor's and master's degrees in Hotel Administration from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where she has served on the faculty as a part-time professor.

**PROPERTY BRIEF** The vibrancy of New York City meets the Las Vegas vibe. New York-New York Hotel & Casino ([www.newyorknewyork.com](http://www.newyorknewyork.com)) features 12 New York-inspired skyscrapers containing more than 2,000 rooms, a high-energy casino, 150-foot replica of the Statue of Liberty, and a 300-foot replica of the Brooklyn Bridge. New York-New York is home to Nine Fine Irishmen, Il Fornaio, New York-based Gallagher's Steakhouse, and the thrilling Roller Coaster.

### What makes New York-New York so special in the Las Vegas market?

Notorious for having tremendous energy and inspired by many of New York City's most renowned landmarks, we're one of the most recognized and photographed resorts in Las Vegas. Our property's design recreates the classic Manhattan skyline and our employees' enthusiasm makes our guests feel welcome.

Our value statement for our employees and guests is "Big City, Small Town." We create the excitement of the New York City scene yet offer the small town feel because we are a small property by Las Vegas strip standards. We're also privileged to have had a large percentage of our employees with us for a long time.

A wide range of our guests choose to visit us because of the icons from New York – the



Renée West

**Renée West, President and Chief Operating Officer, Excalibur Hotel Casino & Luxor Hotel & Casino**

**EDITORS' NOTE** Renée West is the first female President of a Las Vegas Strip property and has served as President and COO for other MGM Resorts International entities. Prior to her appointment

to Excalibur and Luxor, she was at Mandalay Bay Resort, which featured three distinct hotel brands – Mandalay Bay, THEhotel, and Four Seasons. From 2005 to 2009, she was at Excalibur where she implemented a series of major capital improvements at one of the city's most iconic, best-known destinations. At Primm Valley Casino Resorts, a trio of gaming properties on Interstate 15 at the California/Nevada state line, West created the industry's first full-service on-site housing community and developed an award-winning employee transportation program. She held senior positions with Caesars Palace and Station Casinos and provided organizational strategy design for a number of other organizations. Chief among her many certifications and degrees is an honorary doctorate from Southern Utah University.

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Excalibur Hotel Casino ([www.excalibur.com](http://www.excalibur.com)) and Luxor Hotel & Casino ([www.luxor.com](http://www.luxor.com)) are two iconic properties located at the south end of the Las Vegas Strip. Luxor, with its pyramid-shaped architecture along with two additional towers, features a 120,000-square-foot casino and 4,400 rooms. Excalibur, identified by its colorful castle turrets, has a 100,000-square-foot casino and 3,981 rooms.

### Is the market similar for Excalibur and Luxor?

Luxor targets a middle income, younger adult demographic. It's typically someone looking for an assortment of options and for a resort experience. We also have strong appeal for a more value-conscious convention or business traveler given our close proximity to Mandalay Bay.

Excalibur also targets a value customer, but that guest is looking for more of a come-as-you-are experience – a very approachable, fun, high energy, and inviting environment.



Michelle DiTondo

**Michelle DiTondo, Senior Vice President of Human Resources**

**EDITORS' NOTE** In 2011, Michelle DiTondo was named to her current post. DiTondo joined the company in 2006 and was previously the Vice President of Human Resources at Mandalay Bay. She also served as the Vice President of

Human Resources at New York-New York. She has more than 20 years of experience in human resources management, including positions with Caesars Entertainment, American Express, First Security Corporation, and the Army & Air Force Exchange Service. DiTondo received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education from Arizona State University and a Master of Business Administration degree from Brigham Young University.

**COMPANY BRIEF** MGM Resorts International ([www.mgmresorts.com](http://www.mgmresorts.com)) is one of the world's leading global hospitality companies, operating a portfolio of destination resort brands, including Bellagio, MGM Grand, Mandalay Bay, and The Mirage. In addition to its 51 percent interest in MGM China Holdings Limited, which owns the MGM Macau Casino & Hotel, the company has significant holdings in gaming, hospitality, and entertainment; owns and operates 15 properties located in Nevada, Mississippi, and Michigan; and has 50 percent investments in three other properties in Nevada, Illinois, and Macau.

### How has MGM been so successful in attracting talent?

We have been successful in attracting talent because of our company culture. In our industry, culture is critical in attracting and retaining our people because we're in a unique situation where almost all of our competitors are on one street. Operationally, we all use similar systems to check in people and we have similar procedures. Employees don't have a steep learning curve at a new job within the industry. They can start at a new property and learn how to do the job. If we didn't have a culture that drives both engagement and retention, our employees could frequently change jobs without dealing with much change.

## Cynthia Kiser Murphey continued

Brooklyn Bridge and the Statue of Liberty – and we deliver on the New York City theme around food and entertainment offerings. People come to experience our New York-ness.

### **How challenging is the food and beverage part of the business when you look at the competitive set?**

We have spent a lot of time, particularly on our Brooklyn Bridge and strip front development, contemplating how to draw people in.

New York-New York is known for unique venues that you can't find in other places.

For example, we have Nine Fine Irishmen pub, which is celebrating its 10-year anniversary, and we have made a significant improvement to the patio with a fire pit and an expanded balcony with a view of the strip. We have also added an interior patio on the casino side.

We're the number one Guinness Pour in North America and we celebrate our Irish heritage all year, including through the St. Baldrick's Foundation, for which we raise money every year for childhood cancer research – locals and tourists drink Guinness and get their heads shaved. Additionally, we annually host the Celtic Feis St. Patty's Day celebration, which is one of the largest Celtic celebrations on the west coast.

Further in the way of dining, we have Gallagher's Steakhouse, which is a New York-based restaurant, as well as Il Fornaio, which offers tremendous Northern Italian cuisine. The venues are not replicas; we have developed our own concepts that are consistent with our customer base and that work for us.

### **In an industry with so much turnover, how has MGM been so effective in retaining employees? How much of a focus is that for you?**

We have invested for 20 years in an infrastructure that values our people. We have a tremendous commitment to diversity, employee engagement, and recognition, and we provide top-quality benefits and developmental programs for our people.

At New York-New York, we train around "Big City, Small Town," so the Big City elements of training are making sure you're familiar with the details of the big city, from our enticing entertainment including the provocative Cirque du Soleil production, Zumanity, to the fun-filled dueling pianos of Bar at Times Square or our tantalizing restaurants.

The Small Town elements are the details of hospitality – if you're dealing with repeat guests, it's remembering their preferences, their names, their birthdays, and why they visit us. Or if dealing with a new guest, it's figuring out how to convert that person to a repeat guest. So we build programming around that.

### **Is there an understanding of the benefits that gaming brings to a community?**

We build integrated full-service resorts that are entertainment experiences. This brings high quality jobs, great entertainment and leisure opportunities, and tremendous economic development to communities. Additionally, it's our philosophy that our company's success is directly tied to the community's health and well-being. This is why, each year, we make it a priority to donate our time, money, and other resources to support those nonprofit organizations that are helping to serve those people in our community who are in need. ●

## Renée West continued

### **Do accommodations vary much, in terms of decor?**

At Luxor, the pyramid itself is iconic, so although people are not looking for that Egyptian theme, they expect at least a wink and a nod to it.

The recent and upcoming renovations to the property pay respect to the Egyptian theme but in a more contemporary and upscale way.

We just redesigned our center bar and celebrated the grand opening of our new show, Jabbawokeyz, which opened in a brand new theater customized specifically for the show.

The theme at Excalibur is less important to the customer – the castle doesn't make a promise of a medieval experience; it makes a promise of a fun experience, so we do our best to live up to that.

We have just finished a brand new food court with brands that resonate with our customers. We also offer traditional things that have been part of the brand for a long time, like Tournament of Kings that, in many ways, is synonymous with the Excalibur brand.

### **How critical for MGM is the focus on diversity?**

It has been a tremendous culture builder for the entire organization.

As one of the biggest initiatives for MGM Resorts, we are well positioned to be the leader in embracing diversity of thought.

When you get to a more mature place within the diversity initiative, the discussion moves away from talking about gender or ethnicity. What you start talking about is diversity of thought. Every organization is looking for ways to get 100 percent of what is possible from 100 percent of their employees, and that can't be achieved without valuing diversity of thought.

As a woman in a leadership role, my approach is often very different from my male counterparts. I'm proud that I work for a company where that is respected and valued.

### **How has corporate responsibility carried throughout the organization?**

When you run a resort like Luxor or Excalibur, it's a community in and of itself. MGM Resorts as a whole is a large part of the community so when we're working in the community, we're, in essence, taking care of ourselves. It's a great way to diagnose your organization's cultural health because if people care about the community they're a part of, they contribute to that community.

It also tells us how we're doing as leaders. If our workforce is engaged at work, they will also be engaged within the community.

In addition, community involvement is critically important for the emerging workforce coming out of high schools and colleges. It's how they decide with which organization they want to work.

### **In a crowded market like Las Vegas, how do you differentiate?**

Loyalty is at the top of all of our lists. We want people to feel like they have a home in Las Vegas, but we also have to create interest. So reinvesting in the properties is one piece of it; the guests can't wait to see something new. But it's also creating that sense of place and home for people who come to Las Vegas – it's a powerful combination. ●

## Michelle DiTondo continued

Our company culture is also what differentiates us with our guests. For our guests who stroll the Las Vegas Strip, many of the games and types of venues are similar from property to property. We believe that what keeps our guests returning time and again are our people. Our people are the best in the industry, and the key driver behind keeping them engaged is our diversity initiative and years of teaching our managers and leaders how to treat other people. This is the bedrock of our culture.

### **How critical is it that the workforce mirrors the diversity of your clientele?**

It is imperative that our guests see a diverse workforce that reflects our customer base. We feel strongly that our employees should reflect the community in which we operate and the visitors who spend time in our properties. Our hiring sources and recruitment strategies are created to support this philosophy.

From a business standpoint, our diversity initiative has also helped us to understand and appreciate inclusion. Our guest service standards are developed with inclusion in mind and to make our guests feel important, welcomed, and appreciated.

### **Are diversity and inclusion the same or is inclusion the next step after diversity?**

Inclusion is the next step, because inclusion describes more of the behavior that we expect; we believe that both employees and guests should feel important to us and there are specific behaviors that make people feel this way. For example, a warm greeting, eye contact, a sincere interest in helping one another, and an understanding of one another's needs are behaviors that apply both internally and externally to make someone feel valued.

The thing that I like about inclusion is that it tells you that you should do things to make other people feel included; people don't always know what behaviors are expected to embrace diversity. But both diversity and inclusion are about making everybody feel like they're important to us.

### **Do you see more women leading in the industry? What do you tell young women about the opportunities available to them?**

I am very proud that MGM Resorts has always been open to diverse leadership; it has been core to who we are as a company. It's tough for a company to change quickly to be open to women and diverse candidates in leadership roles if it's not part of who you are.

Hospitality is a unique industry in that it's 24 hours, 7 days a week, and pretty demanding. As a mother of two young children, I have tried hard to guard my time at home. Any company will take what you are willing to give, so I always tell young women who often ask how to balance it all that you need to set firm personal guidelines of what you can and can't give your job. A lack of clarity in this area will lead to frustration.

### **What made you feel this opportunity was the right fit for you?**

I love this job. I have an incredible team of HR professionals who want to improve the company and our communities. I personally get a lot of satisfaction knowing that the programs and benefits we implement, although a lot of hard work, may enrich the lives of our employees and their families. ●