HOPE BEYOND THE NEON: THE REBIRTH OF ATLANTIC CITY

BY

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houses, in different colors and sizes. But what’s most striking is the nature that surrounds the two-lane road of the bridge system. Part of it is actually a national preserve. Egrets, Herons, and Ospreys, once almost extinct, flourish here. Existing in stark duality to this placid scene is the skyline of Atlantic City. On clear days, the detail one can view from this distance is striking. By the shoreline, the usual suspects stand, but off to the side rise the so-called “bay” casinos, including the newest, the Borgata. The most surprising part of this view is how pedestrian it all seems. At a distance, Atlantic City looks like any other moderate-sized city, with its own distinctive buildings lending themselves to an overall personality. It is hard to mistake the glittering opulence of the Borgata, or the sleek purple grandeur of Bally’s. It is hard to believe that almost three decades prior, none of it existed. The City looks as it has been there forever, and will be there forever. All of it, from miles away, looks almost thriving. To the viewer, Atlantic City becomes a real city, a bustling metropolis that supports itself and all around it. It is almost a hopeful deception, like wanting to believe something no matter how illogical or impossible it may be.

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The View from the Atlantic

Perspective is a hard thing to come by in Atlantic City, both literally and figuratively. The way the casinos were built so close, all in a row, while the old structures remained behind them, makes it difficult to get a good line of sight in the city of the Boardwalk on land. In the ocean, however, is a different story. There, one can stand less than a mile
away from it all and take it in. It is doubly impressive at night. The casinos stand like neon gods, gazing wistfully out into the great expansive ocean. There are no people, only buildings; they hide the shabbiness of Atlantic City behind their bulk. Again, from a distance, being outside of the city enables the observer to see poetry in the lines of the buildings before him/her. The effect takes on monumental proportions when boating past the bay casinos. Harrah’s is in a constant state of light-induced change. The entire building changes colors every few seconds; the effect is almost hypnotic. Equally hypnotic is the unyielding enormity of the Borgata. The building appears to reach into heaven itself. At night, neon lines of purple run around every floor of the edifice. It carries the aura of limitless possibilities, of opulence, and the achievement of one’s headiest desires. If there is any one casino that personifies the hope of every gambler, this is it. But at night, from the water, every casino seems magical. How fitting that this city by the sea sends out a siren’s call, promising the wealth and success to all who come.

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The Tide of Humanity

Trying to classify the average visitor to Atlantic City is like trying to distinguish rain drops. The wide array of characters that gambling attracts is at once both impressive and, in a way, discouraging. For on the gambling floor one can see senior citizens spending their Social Security checks shooting dice next to a millionaire looking to hit a hard six. One is desperately trying to win more money for life’s necessities while the other is simply spending pocket money for a little excitement. At what point does the thrill of
wagering wane? Apparently, for some, never. A wide swath of humanity pours into the casinos on a daily basis: young and old, local and tourist, educated and unlearned, rich and poor. All blend in so perfectly that at times one yearns to differentiate. Gaming is the only party line that separates them—"I play Blackjack," "I'm more of a poker man myself." It is an odd phenomenon, and one that makes the Atlantic City experience so unique.

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*Flash and Trash*

There is a feeling that sweeps over an individual at the crest of the bridge into Atlantic City. It is one of anticipation. The billboards on either side of the highway serve to feed this emotion. They exclaim, "Big Bucks," "Loosest Slots in Town," and other promises of fast fortune and easy living. The signs urge one to be indulgent, to live for the moment and stake your claim at the casinos. The bridge is a steep incline, and at its apex you can finally gaze upon the city. Indeed, it is quite a sight: brightly lit buildings, temples to the religion of gambling. To the left sits the brand new Convention Center, home to the legendary Miss America pageant and countless other attractions. Past that, there are two more traffic lights that motorists must stop at before Atlantic Avenue, the street where the concrete behemoths await. At the first light stands a monument erected to the concept of the "new" Atlantic City. It is a large steel lighthouse, designed in the same style as the Visitor's Center. Like the Center, multicolor spotlights light up the structure; a verdant park surrounds it. There is also a great deal of construction being done, with new avant-
garde designer shops being named on the “coming soon” banners. However, beyond this enticing block, between there and the second light before the Boardwalk, the landscape suggests a very different type of Atlantic City. The most striking thing one notices is the proliferation of pawn shops. Simply put, they are everywhere, sullen testaments to the dark side of gambling. Almost equally omnipresent is the smut. XXX video stores and strip clubs abound. Buildings are decrepit, sagging slightly like fallen fighters of a bygone era. In the dark, it is easier to dismiss these images and keep moving towards the Atlantic. In the light of day, however, there is no hiding from the truth. Everything is old, and used up.

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“America’s Playground” Lost

The duality of Atlantic City reaches a crescendo once the traveler makes a turn onto Atlantic Avenue. On one side, the casinos. On the other side, the rest of Atlantic City. This duality is as clear as the Atlantic on a cold winter day, as there is no distance between the observer and the subject to cloud one’s judgment. It begs the simple question: which is the true Atlantic City? Is it “America’s Playground,” or is it a washed-up shore town that has succumbed to greed and avarice?

The answer is that it is both. One cannot separate the glitz and glamour of Atlantic City from the dilapidation off of the Boardwalk. It is bitterly ironic that a town built on the hopes of others could use some hope of its own. There are so many positive aspects to Atlantic City; it is a city that has so much more to offer than the pull of a slot machine.
These attractions are the key to cleaning up the town, to recasting Atlantic City in its own once-mighty image. The urban decay will not be resolved until the town rededicates itself to growing. Indeed, the recent wave of construction is a major part of this. However, physical growth can only go so far. The town must grow in culture, in activity, and in style. By doing this, while promoting its non-gambling attractions, Atlantic City can shake off its bad image and provide its customers with a complete entertainment experience. It is the author’s intention to detail how this can be done.

Research Question

What are the environmental and communicative strategies that could enable Atlantic City to renew its promise of increased revenue to the state of New Jersey? For years, the population was told that legalized gambling would clean up Atlantic City and create a thriving economy. This thesis will delve into how this plan stalled, has been recently reinvigorated, and what can be done to capitalize on opportunities and engineer new wins.

Subsidiary Questions

1. Does Atlantic City have an image problem stemming from the fact that most people see it as a one-dimensional gambling town?

2. How can Atlantic City’s local semi-professional sports be better utilized as a draw to the area?
3. Can raising the number of well-known acts performing in Atlantic City make entertainment a more popular reason for visiting?

4. Is the abundance of public transportation options to and from Atlantic City being maximized?

5. How can recent expansion be supported?

6. By leveraging existing alliances, can casinos offer gamblers more incentive to stay?

7. Are the fishing/shore opportunities of Atlantic City being maximized?

8. What can Atlantic City gain by meeting its Eastern competitors (Foxwoods, etc) "head-on?"

9.) Would sports gaming give visitors another worthy attraction to Atlantic City?

10.) Will the above issues aid / harm Atlantic City in promoting its destination aspects in advertising?

Purpose of the Study

For years, Atlantic City has languished as a strictly gambling-first destination. While this pursuit is no doubt extremely lucrative – as evidenced by the construction being done by Caesars, Tropicana, Showboat, Resorts, and the 2,010-room spectacle that is the Borgata—it does not foster the type of overnight stays that are associated with Las Vegas or other resorts. The reason for this is that Atlantic City has positioned itself “as a regional destination resort, rather than a national or international destination…” (Michael Pollock’s…Tax Increase Study, 2003). This puts Atlantic City at a great disadvantage in regards to garnering the interest of the average vacationer. Mohegan Sun has its own
professional WNBA team, as well as a spa, first rate shopping, and fine dining. Las Vegas has something for everyone – museums, natural beauty, entertainment, amusements, and overall spectacles that can not be found anywhere else. What does Atlantic City have to offer to compete? Plenty – but does the average vacationer know?

At a minimum, there is a great deal of room for improvement. For example, a look at the average schedule of entertainment for a casino in Atlantic City reads like the advance for a “where are they now” tour. Also, there is a certain intrinsic feel to other venues. Mohegan Sun bills itself as “A Legendary Experience.” The Las Vegas mystique is almost palpable – walking down the Strip, one can almost visualize the ghosts of Sinatra and Presley. Atlantic City doesn’t have that enduring iconography. True, Atlantic City is the only casino destination that can boast the (literally) natural advantage of the beach, the sun, and the ocean. But how important is that in February? Is it a draw then? For the most part, the shore is irrelevant at that point.

There is a huge opportunity to attract a heretofore untapped market. Most people would consider Atlantic City to be a “day trip” destination. In their eyes, there is nothing more to the place – arrive, gamble, maybe have a meal, and leave. But what if the average tourist had a real reason to stay? A person spending the night equates to revenue, pure and simple. Studies show that “every occupied room night generates $1,069 in revenue” (Michael Pollock’s...Tax Increase Study, 2003). However, the opportunities associated with increasing occupied room nights go beyond just revenue for the casino:

“...every incremental 1,000 occupied room nights in Atlantic City would generate, among other things:
- $62,640 in annual casino revenue taxes, and about $122,000 in overall state and local taxes.
- 7.33 full-time jobs in the gaming industry.
- 9.5 jobs outside the gaming industry.

Clearly, hotel rooms are a primary driver of tax growth in Atlantic City...”

(Michael Pollock’s...Tax Increase Study, 2003)

That is why Atlantic City must do more than rest on its draw as a casino destination. The best way to stimulate growth in the area is to bolster the occupied room rates, and the best way to do that is to market Atlantic City as a place that has a great deal to offer, a place where you do not have to gamble in order to have a great time. There are crucial cogs already in place, and others that can be inserted with relative ease. The city’s skyline is changing as of the writing of this thesis, growing by leaps and bounds. As Atlantic City builds itself up literally, it must also do so figuratively, and cast itself in an image of excitement and prosperity more so now than ever before.

Objectives

The purpose of the thesis is to examine the current state of Atlantic City, and offer ways to increase the city’s reputation as a gambling town with little else to offer. This will be achieved by first looking back at Atlantic City when gambling was in its infancy, explore the economic and societal environment, and explain why gambling was ratified in the beginning. The study of a survey that gauges the subject’s interest in visiting
Atlantic City for gaming, as well as other facets of Atlantic City entertainment, will be examined and the findings interpreted. Then, recommendations will be made based on this data, broken down into two parts:

1. Current forms of entertainment/attraction that Atlantic City currently offers, but communicates poorly or not at all;

2. Forms of entertainment/attraction that Atlantic City does not possess, but would serve as excellent tools in the goal of attracting more tourists to spend a night or more in the city.

Overall, the author's objective is to come up with new, creative, easy-to-implement ideas that the casinos of Atlantic City can use to make the city the type of vacation spot that it has the potential to be, thus increasing tax revenue and for the city and revitalizing the area.

Definition of Terms

The author will devote most of this section to an explanation of the regulatory bodies of Atlantic City gambling. There are two main entities that grant gaming licenses and police casino activity:

**Casino Control Commission (CCC):** The CCC is comprised of five full-time members appointed by the Governor. The commission is responsible for creating new regulations,
granting casino licenses and disciplining the casinos, and collecting taxes and fees due to the state.

Division of Gaming Enforcement (DGE): The DGE is run by a director that reports to the state Attorney General, and is an official assistant Attorney General. Where the CCC is the governing body of the casinos, the DGE is responsible for enforcing the rules that the CCC lays down. The DGE investigates all gaming license applicants and makes recommendations to the CCC accordingly, audits the casino, and prosecutes a casino when a rule has been broken.

There is much discussion pertaining to licensing in this thesis. To gain a gaming license, an applicant must receive at least 4 assenting votes from the CCC. The comply with CCC rules, casinos must be at least 15,000 square feet, a minimum of 500 hotel rooms, have a DGE presence in the casino 24 hours a day, and a majority of the employees must be individually licensed to work on the casino floor ("Atlantic City regulations", 1998).

Limitations

The story of Atlantic City is a fascinating one. It starts a long time before gambling was legalized in 1976. It is a colorful history, one filled with an interesting amalgam of performers, con artists, criminals, and dreamers. The goal of bringing gambling to the city was to bring back the prosperity of yesteryear to the boardwalk. However, for the purpose of this thesis, the author began his study of Atlantic City at the time of the first inquiry into legalized gambling in 1974. One of the greatest challenges in an undertaking
such as this is the enormity of information available. By limiting his discourse to the advent of the “present day” Atlantic City, the author is able to keep the scope of the thesis as focused as possible.

Another limitation to the study involves the survey done by the author to codify the levels of interest by the public for certain entertainment in Atlantic City. Due to the location of the author, the survey’s results could be skewed due to the fact that all of the respondents are for the Northeast section of the United States. While the opinions of those from other parts of the nation may vary, it is to be assumed that they would be relatively similar to the responses received.

Summary/Conclusions

Atlantic City is a city of two distinct visages: one of boundless beauty and crystallized opulence, another of abject poverty and utter despair. Legalized gambling was introduced in order to increase tax revenue to the state of New Jersey and revitalize the city. While the former has occurred with a surge in tax revenue, the hope of revitalization is still a mirage. It is the intention of the author to explore ways that Atlantic City can establish itself as resort town that does not have only the singular allure of gambling to drive tourism. Studies show that by diversifying and increase the number of hotel rooms occupied, employment will increase, as well as tax revenues. Therefore, having multiple forms of entertainment in Atlantic City and properly marketing them is the first step in restoring the more impoverished areas of the city. The best way to see where Atlantic City is now, and where it has to go in the future, is to look to the lessons
of the past to gain a better understanding of how “America’s Playground” has
degenerated. The next chapter will give the reader a better perspective of Atlantic City,
and a better feel for the forces that were at work in the inception and subsequent
propagation of legalized gambling in the city.
Chapter 2

A HISTORY OF ATLANTIC CITY, 1974-1990

The Big Bust

By the early 1970's, the whimsical play land known as Atlantic City had, for all intents and purposes, ceased to exist. For over a century, the city had been the “in” place to vacation on the Jersey Shore. Atlantic City was renowned for having the finest accommodations, cuisine, and of course, pristine beaches at the Jersey Shore. First seen mainly as a resort town for Philadelphia families, Atlantic City had grown into a true center of excitement, complete with unique entertainment, famous stars, and a vibrant nightlife. However, in 1974, this was no longer the case. Simply put, the town was in shambles. The buildings were old and decrepit. This came as no surprise, as "(m)ore than 90 percent of the housing stock had been built prior to 1939, with the majority substandard." (Johnson, 2002, 177) Novelty acts such as the ones found at the famous Steele pier were a distant memory.

What little tourism still existed promptly vanished towards the end of the summer months: "(t)here were days between September and June when a bowling ball could have rolled from one end of Atlantic Avenue to the other without hitting anything. The profile of the streets leading to the beach resembled a garbage pile." (Johnson, 2002, 176) The hotels, once proud symbols of Atlantic City prosperity, had been reduced to crumbling hulks of their previous glory. One by one, they were being demolished, to make way for...nothing. Growth was not even a consideration. The only industries not in a
recession were the ones typically associated with urban blight: discount liquor stores, greasy spoons, and panhandling.

Part and parcel of this was the deterioration of Atlantic City's sense of community. As the middle class departed, all of the things that make up a society did so as well. Churches stood empty and abandoned. Community stalwarts such as Little League and service clubs evaporated overnight. The quaint “mom and pop” stores were being driven out by robbers and thugs. Every commercial and residential building had rooms for rent.

Those who had to remain, due to either consequence or choice, were in dire straits. 33.5 percent of the families living in Atlantic City made less than $3,000 per year. The non-tourist months found the unemployment rate at 25 percent, with 1/3 of the population on welfare. A report discovered that the city had the highest divorce, venereal disease, tuberculosis, and infant mortality rates in the whole state. And none of these figures begin to address the crime epidemic:

“According to the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report, among 528 American cities in the 25,000 to 50,000 population group, Atlantic City had the highest total number of crimes in the seven standard categories. The criminals were poor people stealing from the less poor. No new money of any kind was coming to town. There had been no major construction for nearly a generation. The only activity on the rise was arson.” (Johnson, 2002, 177)

This is the portrait of a city without hope. In the mid-1970's, Atlantic City had fallen farther than anyone could have conceived possible. The only thing left from the city's
once mighty past was ghosts. For, indeed, Atlantic City had become a ghost town. Only broken and faded remnants of the past remained, steadily being replaced by the machinations of poverty, and crime. Something had to be done to address the current situation, and find a way out of the darkness. It was at this point that many believed that the answer was legalized gambling.

*The First Hit*

As early as 1958, the idea of bringing legalized gambling to Atlantic City had been considered. By the early 1960’s, the prevailing thought was that if the city was going to rebound, it needed a draw that no other resort had. Many believed that this “X factor” had to be gambling. The city enviously eyed the effect of casinos on the little town of Las Vegas, and felt that if it could be done in the middle of a desert, then surely it could be successful by the Atlantic. However, there was a great deal of opposition from the local government, specifically in the person of one Frank “Hap” Farley. In title, Farley was the senior state senator representing Atlantic County; in reality, he was one of the most powerful and influential men in the state, and ran the county as his own. The idea of gambling came up towards the end of Farley’s career, and he wanted no part of it. Farley was afraid that if gambling came to Atlantic City, state and federal scrutiny would be focused on the well-established “old boy’s club” that he had built up over the years. Farley wanted no such attention, particularly this late in his career. Even after Farley’s departure, getting legalized gambling ratified was still a daunting task. It would take an amendment to the New Jersey Constitution, which meant that it would have to be approved in a statewide referendum. The referendum required an act of the legislature
and an ok from the governor himself. This would prove to be a roadblock itself, given that the current governor was Brendan Byrne, a man who had earned the nickname “Mr. Clean.” In many ways Byrne was the complete opposite of Farley. There were to be no “back room deals” during his administration: “During his days as a prosecutor, Byrne gained a reputation as a crime fighter and was referred to by the mob as someone who ‘couldn’t be bought.’ He savored his reputation and effused self-righteousness” (Johnson, 2002, 179). Byrne pledged to “restore integrity” to the state government, and institutionalizing gambling certainly was not a part of that. In fact, that particular topic wasn’t even on his political radar screen.

However, the Atlantic City representatives had a different idea. The media, as well as community leaders, were calling for legalized gambling. In effect 1974 was supposed to be the year that it happened, and that the city was going to begin to turn around. Atlantic City had picked up the banner of legalized gambling, and felt extremely confident that the state would follow suit. They were so confident that they felt that their case should be downplayed, that by keeping a “low profile” the referendum would be approved without much dissent.

The proponents of gambling faced three pitfalls in their campaign. First, legislators were beginning to think that Atlantic County was erecting a garish version of Las Vegas with slot machines in every building. Instead, the supporters likened their plan to the more upscale environs of the Bahamas and Monte Carlo. Secondly, there was a rumor being spread that gambling in Atlantic City would eliminate the need for an income tax. Proponents were quick to stress that there was no such connection between the two initiatives, and that gambling was being considered to address the crumbling
infrastructure of Atlantic City only. Part and parcel with the second point, legislators were afraid that if gambling was limited to Atlantic City only, other county representatives might resent it, and try to sabotage it. However, the governor subtly let it known that if the referendum was intended for gambling throughout the state, he would oppose it. There are some who believe that Byrne included this in an attempt to save face while encouraging the other county representatives, now with no vested interest, to vote against gambling. Later, after some prodding by the Atlantic County contingent, Byrne agreed to support the referendum as long as it was modified to include that no other county could engage in legalized gambling for the first five years after the ratification.

The plan was for the first casino to be state-built, operating between the hours of 8:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m. Alcohol would be prohibited, as well as credit to gamblers by the casino. The casinos would be run by state employees, a large (if not impossible) task for such a bureaucracy. Yet somehow, the Atlantic County representatives were able to get the referendum approved through the legislature. Now, those in favor of gambling had to gain the support of the average voter. Here, the opposition became much more intense. Most of the media outlets (both TV and newspaper) in New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia, including The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times, were against legalized gambling; they took every opportunity to allow like-minded citizens to voice their concerns. Many people believed that the only group that would benefit from the change would be organized crime. As one opponent said, “I am concerned that the very same interests which (sic) have allowed Atlantic City to deteriorate will be those who will be the sole beneficiaries of casino gambling” (Johnson, 2002, 183). While crime was the main concern of the public, there was another, more technical one. People felt
that it was unfair to change a state's constitution to address the woes of only one city. If Atlantic City wants to clean itself up, it should do so the way any other major metropolitan area would – find ways to stimulate the economy and attract businesses other than resort-oriented ones. Atlantic City should plan out its future, and deliberately come up with new ways to create jobs. To them, gambling was a "quick fix," a risky solution to a long-term problem. This message struck a chord statewide, especially with voters in cities with similar plights as Atlantic City.

Meanwhile, the proponents of legalized gambling did very little to forward their cause. The city's leaders simply saw this as a foregone conclusion, that Atlantic City was a resort town and that it now needed a hook to maintain its image as such. The idea of converting it into a regular urban center was not even considered. To make matters worse, there was no grassroots campaign – the people believed that politics should be left to the politicians. A pollster for the pro-gaming side asserted that the opposition would make the vote close, but the powers that be ignored the warning. There was no statewide guiding coalition formed, and fundraising generated only half of the $1 million goal. The Atlantic County legislatures made many public speeches, but afterwards there was no attempt to capitalize on any of the newfound support. There were no mailers, no phone calls, and no volunteers knocking on doors. In short, there was no reason outside of Atlantic County to vote "yes."

The referendum to legalized gambling was defeated by over 400,000 votes. It carried in two counties, one of them being Atlantic. Everywhere else, the vote was not even close.
For Atlantic City, this was the death knell. The city’s last hope had vanished, replaced by the grim truth that there would be no “magic bullet” to remedy the situation:

“There were brave statements of how the resort would have to move onto other ideas, but for many of Atlantic City’s residents, the defeat loomed as the final chapter of their town’s history. Those who could afford to relocate their businesses and homes out of the area were making plans to do just that. It seemed all was lost.” (Johnson, 2002, 185)

However, history shows that this was not the case. This begs the question: How was Atlantic City, just two years removed from the defeat of the gaming referendum, able to have it ratified in 1976? The answer is an intriguing one, and understanding the failures of 1974 helps to illuminate where Atlantic City learned from its mistakes and planted the seeds that helped it become the gambling stronghold that it is today.

*The Second Gamble*

In the months following the referendum debacle, Atlantic County legislators began analyzing what went wrong. The idea was to figure out where the initial attempt had failed, and see if a second attempt would be feasible. From the very beginning of this second attempt, it was clear that Atlantic City would have to make its last stand on the issue of legalized gambling. If it was voted down a second time, there would be no further attempt. The population of Atlantic City knew this, and knew that the gambling issue was dead, then so was the concept of the city as a resort, and with it Atlantic City’s rich past.

Atlantic County politicians vowed to address the concerns that sent the legalized gambling referendum to defeat. Their findings illuminated why the vote was so lopsided:
• Exit polling showed that instead of feeling included by the concept of gambling being legalized throughout the state, voters were not interested in bringing legalized gambling to their town. “The voters had visions of slot machines in drugstores and gas stations in every community and they were turned off to the idea.” (Johnson, 2002, 189) For the voters to be swayed, gambling would have to be limited to Atlantic City.

• Voters were also against the idea of the state owning and running the casinos. Rather than ensure them that gambling would be run efficiently, it had the opposite effect. The public didn’t believe that the red tape and favoritism so common to state government would equate to success in business, particularly gambling.

• The message of gambling as a harbinger to moral decay and citywide corruption was an extremely poignant one to many, particularly the senior citizens of New Jersey. The came to vote en masse strictly to oppose gambling.

Of the three main points, the third one took the most thought to solve. The first two concerned making changes to the referendum, but the last one required changing the opinion of a group of people extremely set in their ways. The Atlantic County contingent came up with an inspired idea. It was written into the second referendum that the tax revenues that gambling generated would be allocated for a special fund. The fund would be maintained solely for the purpose of helping to pay off the utility bills and property taxes of New Jersey’s handicapped and senior citizens. Therein lay the hook that was so desperately lacking from the original referendum. Now, a vote against legalized gambling in Atlantic City would be a vote against aiding the needy and infirm of the
state. Plus, this move took the referendum’s staunchest opposition and made them its strongest proponents. This was an idea that the public could get behind, and the local government knew that they had the right message to convey. Now they had to do what was not done the last time: they had to put together a campaign that would win the hearts and minds of the people of New Jersey.

It was decided that the second referendum would be proposed in 1976. It was a presidential election year, which meant that there would be a greater turnout – the gambling coalition felt that this would benefit their cause. It is a known fact that there is a kind of voter who usually will only vote during presidential elections. This group tends to be less informed than the average voter, specifically about the various referendums that can be voted upon (including the Casino Gambling referendum in 1974). At the time of the 1976 election, there was about three-quarters of a million such voters in New Jersey. Coupled with the one-quarter million voters that made up the elderly and handicapped of the state, the pro-gambling side had reason to believe that, with a successful campaign, the second gambling vote would be in their favor.

Funding such a campaign would take a substantial amount of donations. However, with the three changes in the referendum made to counter the anti-gambling arguments, the public was more than ready to open up their wallets. 33 people contributed over $5,000 each, compared to 8 in 1974. Contributions from outside of Atlantic City totaled $518,000; two years before, only $10,150 came from elsewhere. The largest source of income was a relatively unknown company by the name of Resorts International, who donated $250,000. By the end of the campaign, those in favor of legalized gambling donated $1.3 million, over double than the amount raised during the first vote. This
explosion of funds meant that the campaign could afford to create a first-class plan of attack to convince voters to legalize gambling.

With their finances in order and a good idea of their target market, the pro-gambling faction assembled a steering committee to begin their marketing campaign. The group was known as the Committee to Rebuild Atlantic City, or CRAC. CRAC's members were people of influence, both politically and economically, and were intent on doing whatever it took to legalize gambling in Atlantic City. Ironically, Hap Farley, the man who led the push against legalization in 1974, was a member of CRAC. This would lead one to believe that, as it was rumored, that Farley's aversion to gambling was more political than moral.

Polling in 1976 exposed that New Jersey voter opinion was divided almost exactly in three ways over legalized gambling: 34 percent in favor of it, 31 percent against it, and 35 percent undecided. The 65 percent that had already made their decision were polarized towards the issue, and CRAC felt that marketing to them would be a lost cause. Therefore, they planned on focusing their campaigning on those who had yet to form a definitive opinion towards gambling, and find out what it would take to persuade them to vote "yes."

CRAC's campaign manager hired a consulting firm to create a study of the effects of bringing gambling to Atlantic City. The numbers that the firm came up with were extremely positive and displayed the benefits Atlantic City (as well as the state as a whole) could expect should casinos be built:

- $844 million spent on rebuilding and new construction
- 21,000 permanent jobs, 19,000 construction-related jobs
• $400 million in wages

• $17.7 million in the senior citizen/disabled fund by 1980 (Johnson, 2002, 193)

The committee now had a story to tell: one of Atlantic City rising like a phoenix out of the ashes, revitalized thanks to the growth that the casinos would bring. Moreover, as Atlantic City would be experiencing its renaissance, the elderly and infirm across the state would be reaping the benefits as well, giving them hope for a brighter tomorrow. The imagery is appealing, and the message clear — legalized gambling will make New Jersey a better place.

With a concept in mind and numbers to back up their words, the members of CRAC took their message to both national political conventions. The pro-gambling faction was in full force as they hosted lavish parties (sponsored by larger donors to the cause such as Resorts International) in an attempt to garner more acceptance of gambling among the state’s most powerful politicians.

Along with the elite, CRAC sought to strengthen their ties with the public of New Jersey as well. Volunteers were trained, and sent out into the field, giving talks in public venues on the benefits of allowing casinos into Atlantic City. The beauty of this approach was that the committee deputized people from all walks of life, and had them speaking to those of the same vocation. This wasn’t just an insider’s movement; this was a grassroots campaign to educate the average voter and give them a reason to think that legalized gambling was THE answer for Atlantic City.

The final step was the media blitz. In the last two weeks before the vote, CRAC bought $750,000 worth of advertising. Fourteen different television commercials were
aired during that time, with more that 1,200 spots showing up on Philadelphia and New York stations. Radio was even more prevalent, with spots numbering 4,500 on 70 different stations. Most of the ads consisted of an elderly man or woman, looking destitute, and full of worry. The announcer’s voice would then calmly explain the Atlantic City plan, and how it will help this person, as well as thousands of others in need. The voter need not send any money; all he/she had to do was vote for legalized gambling. The slogan was “Help Yourself – Casino Yes.” Billboards, bumper stickers, and lawn signs were everywhere. People were sent door-to-door, to personally deliver the message. The saturation of the pro-gambling agenda was complete.

The proof of CRAC’s success is in the results – The pro-gambling referendum passed by over 350,000 votes. That constitutes a 750,000 voter shift between the 1974 vote and the 1976 one. What makes that figure even more staggering is the fact that the campaign lasted less than four months. The previous defeat, however, was a distant memory in 1976. Finally, Atlantic City would have its legalized gambling. Now, the true work was to begin – the rebuilding of the city, and the construction of the casinos.

*The House Wins*

The big winners of the legalization of gambling are clear – Atlantic City, as well as the elderly and infirm of New Jersey. However, one would be remiss to leave out the name of Resorts International when talking about those that stood the most to gain from the referendum. Resorts International was, above all else, first on the casino scene. When CRAC was first looking for donations, the company was there, and gave in
abundance. Naturally, this gave them the right to own the first casino, meaning that for a short time, they would literally be the only game in town.

The story of Resorts International is almost as dramatic as the story of Atlantic City itself. The company actually began as a small paint manufacturer based out of New Jersey (then known as Mary Carter Paint). The company entered into the casino business in 1962, buying some land in the Bahamas around the same time that the Lansky crime syndicate introduced gambling to the island. One of those purchases was Paradise Island, a luxury resort that, pursuant to the sale, was granted a gaming license. Soon, the executives realized that there was much more money in the casino business than in paint, and sold off the paint division, renaming itself Resorts International.

In 1976, the government of Atlantic City welcomed the executives of Resorts International with open arms. Beyond the pomp and circumstance, the Resorts representatives found the true Atlantic City, the one of decay and neglect: “A person had to be either a visionary or a fool to see an investment prospect in Atlantic City. (The president of Resorts International) may have been a little of each” (Johnson, 2002, 200). Despite the ruined state of old Atlantic City, Resorts bought enough property around that time to become “the largest private land owner in Atlantic City” (“Chequers”, 2003). Along with this, Resorts International invested heavily in the pro-gambling campaign, and was now prepared to reap the benefits.

Resorts started by purchasing one of the less dilapidated Boardwalk hotels, the 1,000-room Chalfonte-Haddon Hall. The also bought the option for a 55-acre plot of condemned land that was adjacent to the Boardwalk. All that was left was for the newly created Division of Gaming Enforcement to investigate Resorts, and subsequently grant a
permit. Due to "bureaucratic foot-dragging," the process was still going on in 1978. It was vital for Resorts to have the first casino on the Boardwalk, and the company threatened to sue. Finally, the company was granted a probationary permit that would last six months, and was renewable for an additional ninety days. On May 28th, 1978, Resorts opened its doors for the first time. It did not take long for Resorts' gamble to pay off even more than its management could have imagined. In the remainder of 1978 (220 days), the casino grossed over $134 million. In 1979, its first full year of operation, their gross was $232 million. Keep in mind that at this time, if one wanted to gamble in Atlantic City, he/she had to go to Resorts. Demand was through the roof – thousands of people waited in line to try their luck.

Meanwhile, the unbridled success that came with a total gambling monopoly for Resorts was terrifying to the Division of Gaming Enforcement. Rather than having to prove that Resorts was worthy of a license, it now had to show if the company was undeserving, and if so, shut it down. Six months after gambling began in Atlantic City, the Division handed down its verdict: Resorts would be denied its license. Its reasoning included allegations of shifty dealings in their Bahamas holdings and accounting irregularities found there and at the Atlantic City site. Atlantic City's first casino was being threatened, and the battlefield would be the courts.

The casino's defense was a simple one: they intended to basically filibuster until the Gaming Commission was hushed into submission, and the media had nothing controversial or even mildly interesting enough to cover. Calmly, the unsavory business deals were explained away as "business as usual" in the Bahamas, as well as the company's accounting style. Also, the prosecutor's case was exposed as being over-
inflated and circumstantial. In the end, Resorts International was granted a license, and
the Division's report vanished into the vapor. Some media outlets complained that this
was the beginning of the corruption that comes with legalized gambling, and it certainly
would not be the end of it. Despite this, it was clear that the war was won, and the public
continued to flock to the only place to gamble in Atlantic City. However, like any good
gambler (or businessman) knows, shrewd minds find where the action is, and soon
Atlantic City would begin to welcome more casinos to its rejuvenated Boardwalk.

The Players

Caesars Atlantic City

Even before Resorts International began its dominance of the gaming scene in Atlantic
City, others were formulating a way to be the next casino built. Ask the average person
on the street if s/he recognizes the names of Clifford and Stuart Perlman, and the
inquisitor is likely to get a blank stare. However, say the name of their casino, Caesars
Palace, and the recognition is instant. If there is a worldwide branding of the concept of
casino gambling, surely Caesars is largely responsible. Building upon the reputation of
glitz and glamour that is their Las Vegas locale, the Perlmans set their sights upon
bringing that experience to the shores of the Atlantic. As innovators constantly at the
forefront of the casino industry, it was naturally assumed that they would do so.

Caesars Palace in Las Vegas started off as most casinos there did – completely run by
the mob. When the Perlmans bought the casino, "all they changed was the locks, leaving
most of the management in place." (Johnson, 2002, 211) It was all part of the
"unsavory" characters" and shady dealings that were always in place, but "which seemed
to continue under the Perlman's ownership" ("Chequers," 2003). They retained Caesars' previous employees based on the idea that if it isn't broken, then don't fix it. What was not taken into account was the fact that while Caesars' managers were competent casino businessmen, they were also linked very heavily to organized crime. The links to the mob would not end there – Caesars World Inc., the casino's parent company, bought a country club and condominium development from a partnership; one of the men had known links to the Meyer Lansky crime syndicate, while the other had been indicted for embezzlement at the nearby Flamingo Casino. As the years went by, the Nevada Gaming Commission warned the Perlmans to not engage in business with known criminals. Each time their admonition fell on deaf ears as the brothers grew their empire.

It is with this history that Caesars attempted to gain entrée into the world of casino gambling in Atlantic City. In June of 1979, Caesars joined the fray of Atlantic City gambling on a temporary basis. The Perlmans leased the Howard Johnson on the Boardwalk (calling it the Caesars Boardwalk Regency), with an eye on even bigger and better things soon. It was their vision to create another Las Vegas-style Palace, cast in the image of the original. However, after the debacle that ensued following Resorts' initial rejection, then approval, for a gaming license, the New Jersey Division of Gaming was not going to simply bestow a license on the first company that asked. Couple this with the Division's aversion to a corrupt gaming industry in New Jersey, and the Perlmans' dreams of expanding eastward were in jeopardy. In late 1980, the Division deemed the brothers too much in the pocket of organized crime to be trusted. They ruled that the Boardwalk Regency would be granted a permanent license only on the condition that the Perlmans divest themselves of all ownership of Caesars World Inc. After
numerous appeals and attempts at deals to keep them in the management, the Perlmans were bought out by Caesars World and the Regency was allowed to stay. The World still planned on creating a Palace, and even bought the Traymore Hotel to be the site. However, this never happened. In 1987, Caesar’s Boardwalk Regency became Caesar’s Atlantic City, and remains one of the most popular casinos on the Boardwalk to this day.

**Bally’s Park Place**

Bally’s Incorporated started out as a manufacturer of slot machines and jukeboxes. The company, which had operations in New Jersey, had annual revenues of nearly $400 million with approximately 80% domestic market share of slot machines at its pinnacle in the late seventies. However, much like the Caesars World owners, the management of Bally’s Park Place became notorious for having links within organized crime. Its largest distributor (and former part owner) was Gerardo Catena, an underboss in the Genovese crime family. The organization was so overtly corrupt that even the Nevada Gaming Commission, which granted a license to the Perlmans, would not allow Bally’s to build a casino until it cleaned up its act, which it subsequently did.

Despite this, the Atlantic City Division of Gaming was not as confident that Bally’s management was suitable. It took them two and a half years to investigate Bally’s Incorporated before it would even grant a temporary license. Eventually it did, and Bally’s Park Place opened on December 30, 1979. Built on the former sites of the old Marlborough-Blenheim and Dennis Hotels, the project cost over $300 million. The permanent licensing took an additional year. During this time, the company did
everything that it could to garner public opinion — fire its old chairman (who had his own mob connections), and donate heavily to local charities. Plus, Bally's had actually done a thorough job of renovating a monument to the city's old days — "To Bally's credit, the commission, after touring the complex before opening, were (sic) extremely impressed with the renovation job Bally's had done on the old Dennis" (Piccolo, AC History). Bally's overtures towards becoming as legally compliant as possible, its work in the community, and its commitment to the rebuilding of the Boardwalk were rewarded when the Gaming Commission granted Bally's Park Place a permanent license in 1980.

The Golden Nugget/Hilton Atlantic City

Steve Wynn was one man who the exact kind of background that the Casino Control Commission was looking for in a casino owner. Wynn had absolutely no ties to organized crime; he was simply a bright businessman who had proven himself in Las Vegas. Leveraging revenues from some shrewd land deals, Wynn began buying stock in the Golden Nugget at a time when the casino was not being run well and was in desperate need of new management. Once he had enough stock to become a member of the Board of Directors and receive the title of executive vice-president, Wynn made his move. He accused the current president of condoning poor business practices, and threatened to sue if he did not step down. The president agreed to do so, and Wynn took over the position in 1973.

At first, Wynn had zero interest in expanding his operations into Atlantic City. On a visit to the city in 1976, he saw that the town was largely a wasteland, and decided that it would be no threat to his Las Vegas kingdom. However, upon a return trip shortly after
the opening of Resorts, Wynn had a change of heart. Seeing the throngs of people waiting in line just to gamble made him realize that there was a great opportunity here. He commented that "(he) had never seen anything like it. It made Caesar's Palace on New Year's Eve look like it was closed for lunch" (Johnson, 2002, 217). Before he left Atlantic City, he had already hammered out an agreement to purchase The Strand motel, which was immediately demolished. In its place was built a casino that harkened back to the better days of Atlantic City. The Victorian-style building cost almost $200 million and came complete with high ceilings, crystal chandeliers, extravagant murals behind the front desk, and marble columns. The Golden Nugget opened its doors on December 9, 1980. The acquisition of a permanent license, while still a lengthy as ever (one year), was scandal-free and relatively smooth. In the first six months of 1981 the Nugget garnered $17.7 million in profits, more than any of the other casinos operating combined. Despite this success, Wynn grew extremely disenchanted with Atlantic City, particularly the Gaming Commission. When he realized that he would not be able to change the rules at all, Wynn sold the Nugget to Bally's in 1986 (the building is still run by Bally's parent company under the Hilton name).

Sands

There is a classic photograph of the membership of the Rat Pack – a handful of entertainers that redefined the meaning of the word "hip" in the 1960's – standing in front of a Las Vegas casino marquee. The casino in question is The Sands. Before its destruction in 1996, the Sands epitomized the spectacle that is Las Vegas. Bringing that kind of history to the fledgling casino industry in Atlantic City appeared to be a perfect
fit. Though the original is gone, the Sands Atlantic City is still going strong. However, the casino actually did not start out its existence as the Sands. The casino was built by the Create Bay Casino Company, based out of Ocean City, New Jersey. It is interesting to note that this was the first casino that was owned and operated by a local business. In a show of respect, the casino was named The Brighton, after the hotel that it had replaced. After having the gaming scene dominated by out-of-town forces that saw Atlantic City as no more than a strategic business platform, it was hoped that a company that may actually have the best interests of Atlantic County at heart would be able to succeed.

Sadly, that was not to be the case. One of the Brighton’s efficiencies would turn into a big disadvantage. The Brighton was built smaller than the competition, and therefore cost less to build – $69 million, glaringly less than the other casinos. At 32,000 square feet, the casino did not have as much “gaming floor” to offer as the others on the Boardwalk. The Brighton opened August 31, 1980; almost immediately, it began losing money, and there was talk of it having to file for bankruptcy. Soon it was bought by the company that owned the Sands in Las Vegas. Hoping to make the most of the famous name, The Brighton was renamed the Sands of Atlantic City in 1981.

Harrah’s

Most people equate legalized gambling in Atlantic City with the Boardwalk: this is not the case. There are three casinos – Harrah’s, Trump Marina, and the Borgata – that are known as the “bay” casinos. These stand at the mouth of the Atlantic City inlet, past the boardwalk and beyond the city proper. There has been much publicity surrounding this area for many years. First, the Marina (then the Castle) was the docking place of Donald
Trump's yacht, the *Trump Princess*. Now, all eyes are on the Borgata, the newest attempt to bring the style and attitude of Las Vegas to Atlantic City. However, before both of these casinos, there was Harrah's. The casino was the brainchild of Bill Harrah, who already had established two successful gaming establishments in Reno and Lake Tahoe. Unfortunately, a month after deciding to build, Harrah passed away, and the company was sold to Holiday Inns, Inc in 1978, three years before their parent company would buy The Brighton. Originally, the casino was going to be named The Holiday Inn Marina Casino. However, much as they would capitalize on the Sands name, Holiday Inns decided to retain the Harrah's moniker. Harrah's Marina opened on November 23, 1980, and has been an unequivocal success. People who are not interested in the hustle and bustle of gaming on the Boardwalk welcomed the opportunity to gamble in a more relaxed atmosphere. Though now facing stiff competition from the Borgata, Harrah's remains a thriving locale to this day.

**The Claridge**

When walking down the Boardwalk in Atlantic City, it is very easy to pass by the Claridge Hotel and Casino without even realizing it. For one, it's not exactly on the Boardwalk; rather, it is pushed one block back, with an extensive garden and large fountain between it and the Atlantic. What makes the Claridge even more camouflaged is its architecture. It is much smaller than the other casinos, and while all of the others allure with flashing neon and grand designs, the Claridge is a simple red brick building. The building is one of the few that remains the same today as it did before gambling
came to town. It has seen the ups and downs of Atlantic City, and stand as homage to its
carefree summer playground past.

The Claridge was refurbished by the Webb Company, a firm with strong roots in the
gaming industry (as well as organized crime). Its founder, Del Webb, built the Flamingo
Hotel for Vegas mastermind (and mob boss) Bugsy Siegel, the first building on The Strip.
Webb’s casino resume was impressive including The Sahara and The Mint, as well as
others in Reno and Lake Tahoe.

In 1979, Webb Company partnered with Claridge Associates, the owners of the hotel.
Claridge Associates was in the process of renovating the Claridge, but had run out of
funds and needed help. Through its holding, the Claridge Management Corporation
(formerly known as the Webb Company had been indicted on several charges of financial
impropriety) finished the job on the 500 room hotel and 30,000 square foot casino. Even
back on July 20, 1981 when the Claridge held its grand opening, it was the smallest
casino in Atlantic City. As more and more visually enticing casinos were being built up
around it, the Claridge found itself fighting for its existence on many occasions.
However, even through multiple sales over the past 22 years, the casino remains in
business, marketing its product under the belief that “smaller is friendlier.”

The Tropicana

The original plan for the rebirth of Atlantic City involved the restoration of its classic,
though extremely dilapidated, hotels that line the Boardwalk. There had been few cases
where this plan succeeded – for the most part, the majority of companies that tried to
refurbish the old buildings failed miserably. It is important to remember that many these
hotels were over 50 years old and even then were not always built to regulation. That is why when Ramada Inns unveiled its plans to utilize the existing Ambassador Hotel, the powers that be were very skeptical. So much, in fact, that Governor Byrne himself stepped in and told Ramada that the Ambassador had to be demolished. At first the company threatened to file a lawsuit, claiming that it was unfair to be judged based on the shortcomings of other corporations, but soon accepted a compromise. Instead of destroying the entire building, they stripped the edifice down to its steel girders and then built it back up.

In 1979, around the same time that the Ambassador began losing its brickwork, Ramada bought the Tropicana in Las Vegas. This turned out to be a double-edged sword for the company. On one hand, Ramada now could attach the easily recognized Tropicana name to its Atlantic City venture. On the other hand, Ramada allowed the management from the Las Vegas Tropicana to remain on staff despite allegations of embezzlement and various corruptions (apparently a running theme in most Las Vegas casinos). Despite this newfound guilt by association, the Tropicana opened on November 23, 1981, and, when finished, ended up costing $400 million ($270 million over budget).

Within the framework of this study, the Tropicana presents itself as an interesting case study. It begs to be noted that the Tropicana made an attempt to reinvent itself as more than just a casino shortly after its opening. On November 23, 1981, the casino changed its name to Trop World in an attempt to gain the image of a “mega resort” (Weinert, June 1996). Part of earning the billing included the construction of Tivoli Pier, two acres of Boardwalk-style amusements that included rides (both a roller coaster and a
Ferris wheel), games, and entertainment. The idea was to give adults a reason to stay in Atlantic City that didn’t involve a slot machine or a deck of cards. Children under 18 could not gain access without an adult; Trop was marketing the Pier to adults and did not want the area to become a child unloading area for parents eager to get back to gambling. Despite this attempt to keep Tivoli Pier from becoming kid-centered, the area soon became a destination for youngsters. The experiment ended in 1996, when Trop World returned to the Tropicana name and scrapped Tivoli pier. The reasoning, according to Dennis Gomes, then-president of resort operations for Tropicana’s parent company, was that “(moving away from non-gaming activity) identifies what we’re pursuing, which is adult entertainment. Gambling is something for adults, not children” (Weinert, June 1996). Ironically, some 8 years later, Tropicana is in the process building The Quarter, an area that will be filled with the sort of entertainment the Tivoli Pier once had. A more thorough examination of Tropicana’s recent expansion will be detailed later on in this chapter.

The Showboat

The Showboat, which opened in 1987, was the last major casino to be built on the Boardwalk for some time. The casino was owned by Showboat Inc., who had already established itself with the Showboat Casino in Las Vegas. It was built on land owned by Resorts; Showboat had to pay $6 million a year in leasing fees. Much like Tropicana, it tried to offer more than just a place to gamble. In fact, Showboat was one of the only casinos that offered any form of family entertainment. Features included a bowling alley, extensive buffets (rather than upscale dining), and less suites than the average casino.
While these traits proved successful in Las Vegas, they fell flat in Atlantic City. The bowling alley, while successful due to its novelty at first, quickly became passé and had to shut down. Showboat’s “approach was based on assumptions that casinos would become accepted, legitimate businesses…the failure (of Showboat’s family positioning) reflects some lingering moral considerations that gambling doesn’t mix well with family life and the fact that there still isn’t much for families to do in and around Atlantic City” ("Regular folk," 1988). Showboat shifted its focus on attracting the larger scale gambler, or “whale,” by adding an upscale restaurant, shopping, and a health spa. Apparently, either Showboat didn’t have its pulse on what the average gambler was looking for, or more probably, Atlantic City did not have the perception of a “full-service” destination that the Showboat of Las Vegas thrived on. It is this psychological barrier that Atlantic City must overcome to be seen as more than just a gambling town.

The Donald

No history of Atlantic City would be complete without a sizeable portion being devoted to Donald Trump. The epitome of eighties capitalism, Trump’s impact on the building of the city into what it is today is striking in both its depth and breadth. It seems as though during the mid-1980’s no one made a decision on the Boardwalk without Trump somehow being involved. How this real estate mastermind was able to build three successful casinos so close together is a testament to his business acumen. Much like the colorful peaks and ridges of his Taj Majal, Donald Trump has had his share of ups and downs. The son of Fred Trump, a man considered “the Henry Ford of the home-building industry” (Johnson, 2002, 226), Donald was the man who convinced his father to move to
commercial ventures. It was through this medium, in the lightning fast world of New York real estate, that Donald began building his empire. His acquisitions were noteworthy not only for the actual property purchased, but how Trump had an uncanny knack for always negotiating the best deal possible (sometimes even better than possible). For example, he was able to buy the Commodore Hotel next to Grand Central Station for $10 million dollars, and then “convinced the city to give him an unprecedented 40-year tax abatement, valued at a minimum of $160 million.” (Johnson, 2002, 227) While it was largely believed that the city made a mistake and was harshly admonished by Trump’s rivals, the deal went through because at the time no other developers were building hotels in New York. It was this penchant for taking risks and reaping huge rewards that would be Trump’s calling card for years to come. Trump’s lynchpin in New York was the Trump Tower, a dazzling and extravagant condominium complex. The price tag for living in the Tower went into the seven figure range, and typified the Trump philosophy; namely, less is not more – more is more. It was with this mentality that Donald Trump decided that his next big deal would be in Atlantic City.

In the early 1980’s, Atlantic City was rolling out the red carpet for the Donald Trumps of the world. The town needed so much restoration that anyone who wanted to be a part of the “new” Atlantic City was given the royal treatment. It was a mindset that would last well into the early 1990’s, coincidentally around the same time that Trump would build his final casino, the Taj Majal. His first venture into gambling, the Trump Plaza, is a perfect illustration of the “wide open” early years of casino-building in Atlantic City.

The story of the Plaza starts before The Donald even entered the picture. First, a close associate of Howard Hughes, Robert Maheu, came up with the design for a 1,000-room
hotel located next to Convention Hall. Shortly after he and his partner had leased the land, they announced the construction of second, slightly smaller casino. There were many more press conferences after that, mostly to announce changes in plans, shifting of management, and other sundry details. Soon more daring, if not outlandish, undertakings were made public. Maheu promised “tamper proof” surveillance systems, as well as a 2 mile long roller coaster ride in Las Vegas. Neither of these endeavors saw the light of day, and neither did the two casinos. The SEC investigated, and found that Maheu and his associate were, in essence, nothing more than con men. They found that Maheu had issued “false and misleading statements” in an attempt to make himself look like a reputable Las Vegas gaming executive, and that his two holding companies were “defunct publicly traded shell corporations.” (Johnson, 2002, 228) This left Maheu with a lot of Atlantic City land, with no one willing to invest in his plan. It is at this point that Donald Trump entered the picture.

Trump’s first move was to lease the land from Maheu and his partner, then take total and complete control of the project. It is important to note that Trump was entering an Atlantic City environment that was far from ideal. Growth had outstripped the demand for gambling, and several of the casinos were already losing money. The more pressing concern was that nine casinos already stood on the Boardwalk, yet the city remained largely untouched since the referendum was approved. There was a need for a “shot in the arm” that would come with new construction: additional tax streams, renovation to unusable land, and employment. Trump was seen as the next evolution of Atlantic City.

All of Trump’s predecessors found themselves at the mercy of the Casino Control Commission. Trump sought to gain the upper hand by refusing to begin construction
until he was granted a casino operator’s license, a totally unprecedented gambit. The problem was that the Commission did not know how to go about such a process. Previously, every other casino was first granted a temporary license so that building could commence, then underwent review to ensure that the owners were qualified to operate in Atlantic City. However, at this point temporary licenses had been abolished, and Trump was not about to build a casino that he could not keep. He put further pressure on the Commission by stating that if the review process took over a year (as it had for most casinos), he would discontinue his plans. To this end, the Commission and the DGE agreed to complete their investigation in six months. Trump knew that city and state government were banking on Trump to usher in the “second wave” of Atlantic City construction, and was willing to gamble on the fact that they would grant him his license rather than watch him leave town. His brashness paid off, as the Commission decided that Trump would be granted a license upon completion of his casino.

Trump deftly displayed his vaunted “art of the deal” when he partnered with the Holiday Corporation, who already owned the Harrah’s Marina Hotel Casino in Atlantic City. The agreement that he stuck with Holiday in 1982 was masterful. For half-ownership of his casino, Holiday reimbursed Trump his to-date investment of $22 million plus $50 million, as well as financing estimated to be between $170 and $250 million. Even with a price tag of $220 million, the casino was built using none of The Donald’s own money; yet he still ended up realizing tremendous revenues while still maintaining half-ownership in the property. Add to this the fact that Harrah’s agreed to manage the casino and guaranteed Trump five years of zero financial losses, and one would think that Trump and Harrah’s would be a match made in heaven. This would not be the case. As
Trump asserted in his autobiography, "money was never a big motivation for me, except as a way to keep score. The real excitement is playing the game" ("Quotations Page," 2003).

On May 22, 1984, Harrah's Boardwalk Hotel Casino at Trump Plaza opened, and within six months Trump felt that Harrah's was not managing the casino correctly. Part of it was solely Trump's ego, as evidenced by the casino's name change to Harrah's at Trump Plaza, then simply Trump Plaza. However, Trump had a valid reason for questioning Harrah's running of his holding. Trump, in his own inimitable way, had created the Plaza in his own style, opulent and well-adorned. The Plaza had 85 luxury suites, built for what was supposed to be its high rollers. This was not Harrah's target audience – they catered to low-budget gamblers who mostly played the slot machines.

The two strategies did not mix, and less than a year into its inception the Plaza was ranked seventh out of the ten casinos in earnings. It was around this time that Trump was given the opportunity to open his second casino – The Atlantic City Hilton, now known as the Trump Marina.

The Atlantic City Hilton, located next to Harrah's on the bay side of Atlantic City, began construction in the early 1980's. Rather than force the issue as Trump did, they began construction without being granted a permanent license. Hilton, a world-renowned hotelier, had no doubt that when the time came, they would be considered qualified to run a casino. In February of 1985, the Commission rewarded Hilton's confidence by denying them a license. The Commission soon afterward was pressured into reopening the hearing, but by then the damage had been done. Hilton did not want to risk further embarrassment and discontinued its casino plans. Plus, the Hilton Corporation was in a
bitter takeover struggle, ironically with Steve Winn, owner of the Golden Nugget casinos. Again, ever the opportunist, Trump saw an opening and bought the Atlantic City Hilton for $325 million. In June of 1985, the Trump Castle opened, and unlike his other casino, Trump was in complete control. This put him in the unique position of being in direct competition with his Plaza partner. It was the final straw in a feud that had been brewing since the Plaza opened, and Harrah’s sued Trump for using his name at the Castle while it was attached to their co-owned property. Later on in the same year, Harrah’s tired of fighting The Donald and sold their half of the Plaza to him for $67 million. He was quoted as saying “it was one of (his) most savored transactions” (“Chequers”, 2003).

Trump began planning his third casino, the Taj Mahal, in 1986. The Taj was the brainchild of Resorts owner Jim Crosby, who envisioned a palatial “dream hotel” on the Boardwalk. Construction was under way at the time of Crosby’s death. Trump then decided that he would be the one to finish turning Crosby’s fantasy into a reality, and convinced Crosby’s heirs that he should be the one who completed the Taj Mahal. Persuasive as always, Trump got his wish, and Crosby’s benefactors sold their stock to him. However, while this was going on, entertainer Merv Griffin had been buying up shares of Resorts, and a power struggle between these two heavyweights ensued. It was Trump’s intention to shut down the Resorts casino in Atlantic City, as gaming laws mandated that no one can own more than three casinos. Griffin wanted no part of that deal, and insisted that Resorts remained opened. A deal was struck wherein Griffin would take control of all Resorts properties except for the Taj Mahal, which was in reality Trump’s only interest in Resorts.
Upon closer inspection of the work already finished on the Taj Mahal, Trump found that the project was in trouble. The quest for the ultimate in exorbitance had led to the casino being a tremendous drain first on Resorts, and now on Trump. It is hard to envision Trump relishing the task of building the Taj when "(m)ost casino analysts believed it was simply too expensive to finish and was better off abandoned." (Johnson, 2002, 233) Rather than dismay, Trump pushed forward, and in April 1990 the Taj Majal opened.

The Taj Mahal is truly a spectacle, and probably best embodies Trump's legacy in Atlantic City. In fact, it makes its namesake look quite modest in comparison. The Taj resembles the fortress of a bygone era. The façade overlooking the Boardwalk is a complex network of towers, brightly color domes, and intricate lattice work. The entranceway from Atlantic Avenue is doubly impressive, with its high walls and blindingly bright neon. It was the type of garishly glorious temple of gaming that Trump had always envisioned since entering the Atlantic City scene. It also put him roughly $1 billion in debt. Trump was forced to declare bankruptcy, but it was mostly the contractors that had built the Taj that suffered the most from that deal. The Taj survived its shaky beginnings, and remains a profitable casino. Similarly Donald Trump, who has seen his share of success and failure in Atlantic City, remains on top, and is arguably the most influential man in the city's casino industry.
In 1974, a select few had a dream for Atlantic City. It was one that would put the dilapidated town back on its feet and make it the jewel of New Jersey. It was legalized gambling. However, the execution of the initial drive towards gaming fell flat, due mostly to overconfidence and a lack of underlying purpose. Voters were afraid of the evils that come with gambling, and the supporters did nothing to assuage those fears. An unattractive, cumbersome plan for legalization was proposed, and was quickly struck down. Many critics saw this as the end of Atlantic City. The town had fallen too far, too fast, and was out of options. It was believed that gambling would be the only draw that could turn Atlantic City around. Two years later, that belief would get a second chance.

This time using the shield of revenue for the elderly and infirm (as well as a slick campaign and shrewd strategizing), gambling became legal in Atlantic City. The first casino, Resorts, was built from one of the town’s old hotels, and stood as a symbol of what was, what is, and what shall be. Soon after, a cadre of first time casino owners, seasoned gaming veterans, fakes, frauds, winners and losers, all descended on Atlantic City with the dream of building their own casino. Three of the casinos are owned by the man who has come to personify Atlantic City, Donald Trump. The Donald has wheeled and dealt, and touched the existence of most casinos in town. By the time he built his third casino, the Taj Majal, Atlantic City was in need of a facelift. While the initial wave of growth had brought revenues, it had not brought much expansion off the boardwalk, into the city. The Taj was supposed to be the starter’s pistol that would initiate the “next big thing” in Atlantic City. History shows that this is not the case. The obvious question
is "why?" Simply put, it would take more than building a few casinos to change the city. Unknown to the group at the time there was something looming on the horizon, something that would kick off the most exciting and revolutionary period that a resort town trying to regain its past glory could ever envision. As the reader will see, it would be some years later that true change would begin in Atlantic City.
Chapter 3

THE REBUILDING OF ATLANTIC CITY, 1990-PRESENT

Rolling the Dice

Part and parcel with the revitalization of Atlantic City is the idea of repackaging the resort. Even in its heyday, the town was considered a bit tawdry for some. Gambling was a fact of life way before legalization occurred, only then it was in the back rooms of smoke-filled bars. Atlantic City was always the family resort with an unseemly underside, and when the resort business founndered, all that was left was the corruption and crime. Legalized gambling was supposed to ameliorate all of the town's woes, when in fact it only served to exacerbate them. The grubbiness of Atlantic City was never pushed out; it was simply redistributed. As the years wore on, the sparkling new casinos and spectacles of the boardwalk faded. From 1990 to 2000, time served to only worsen the situation in Atlantic City - by the turn of the century the town had become the end of some tired joke. The casinos were still profitable (there seems to be no recession in hope), but the idea of the city as a destination spot for anything other than a day trip to gamble was laughable. Luckily, there were many casinos that were willing to expand, and plans in the works for one casino to be built that would completely change the way business was done in Atlantic City.

As aforementioned, it was believed that the building of the Taj Mahal would usher in the next wave of extensive growth in Atlantic City. Sadly, this was not to be the case. For the next decade, no new casinos were built, and no noteworthy renovation was done on the existing ones. However, the new millennium would usher in a new age of
restoration, both on the Boardwalk and off. The process began in 2000, when Bally’s Park Place received approval to add a $30 million extension to its existing Wild Wild West casino. The addition would include non-gambling attractions, such as a gift shop, a bakery, and a display of “old west” memorabilia.

The Wild Wild West became one of the first casinos to have more of a “Las Vegas” theatrical appeal. Upon entering the casino from the boardwalk, one is greeted by an animatronic prospector panning for gold. The ceilings are high, and are built to give the appearance of canyons. The bar on the casino floor pays homage to the frontier bars of yore. This type of “attraction-based” marketing is exactly what Atlantic City casinos must try to accomplish if the concept of the city as a destination locale is to succeed. The words of Bally’s spokesman Brian Cahill support this idea: “The fully themed façade of the Wild Wild West is a kind of must-see attraction for the center of the Boardwalk...The bright, multicolored exterior creates a friendly, inviting atmosphere for guests with upbeat, lively music that sets the tone for a resort experience” (Weinert, January 2003).

In short, The Wild Wild West is unique, pleasing to the eye, and a bit whimsical. This is the spirit that would at last usher in the second wave of growth that the city had hoped for.

The Rules are About to Change

The lynchpin of the new Atlantic City is the Borgata Hotel Casino and Spa, which opened its doors on July 2, 2003. The 2,010- room casino is a partnership between Boyd Gaming (owners of 12 casinos nationwide) and MGM Mirage (a longtime player in the Las Vegas gambling scene that most recently built the ultra-luxurious Bellagio).
Originally announced in 1996, the project has taken many shapes over the past few years. At first it was supposed to be named “The Stardust – Atlantic City” and would be a smaller casino. However, plans were amended and the concept for the Borgata as the premier casino in Atlantic City was established. After 13 years, Atlantic City would have its next big thing.

When Bob Boughner, the casino’s CEO, stated that “There’s no question that this is a Las Vegas-style mega-resort,” he summed up the hopes of all of Atlantic City – that the Borgata would propel the town into an elite status (Sloan, August 2003). The casino does much to fulfill Boughner’s promise. First and foremost, the appearance of the Borgata is different from all other hotels in Atlantic City. Rather than be built on a small, cramped piece of land, the casino is surrounded by rolling hills and verdant growth. The Borgata is located on the “inlet” side of town, between Harrah’s and Trump Marina. However, neither of these casinos covers the expanse of land that the Borgata does. Also different is the sheer size of the casino. One is truly unable to fully understand this point without seeing it in person. The Borgata is huge, and is a brilliant shimmering gold color. Around sunset the building is a blinding mélange of reds, oranges, and yellows. The message is clear – the other casinos are the past, this is the future of Atlantic City.

Walking into the Borgata is equally as breathtaking. Those who drive in enter through the shopping area, which boasts some of the finest stores in town. In stark contrast to the windowless, stuffy gaming floors one would find in most casinos, the Borgata is pleasantly lighted, with high ceilings and warm earth tones. World-famous artist Dale Chihuly’s glass artwork can be found throughout the casino, with the most impressive pieces showcased in the main lobby. Anyone who walks the floor for a minute will
become instantly cognizant of the fact that all of the waitresses look like models. These are the "Borgata Babes," and each brings the air of a Vegas getaway to the casino.

And then there is the food. The Borgata offers fine dining the likes of which no casino could. First there is the Old Homestead, a satellite of the well-known restaurant in New York, which offers $95 Kobe beef steaks and $40 Kobe beef hamburgers. The Borgata is also home to a restaurant headed by world-famous chef Susanna Foo; in all, the casino boasts four five-star restaurants. Victor Tiffany, who heads the food department, insists that "This is a market so ready to trade up" (Sloan, August 2003).

A look at the list of treatments available at Borgata’s Spa Toccare speaks to this desire to “trade up.” Just about every massage, facial, or body therapy under the sun is available. The Spa boasts 22 private rooms taking up 50,000 square feet. With all of these amenities available to tantalize each of the senses, perhaps the motto of its restaurant/nightclub, Mixx, best sums up the Borgata experience: “Too much of a good thing is a good thing” ("The Borgata Home Page").

After all of this, after the spectacle of the artwork and the performers and the restaurants and the pampering, comes the gambling. The three acre gaming floor encompasses 145 gaming tables and 3,650 slot machines. The slot machines are completely coinless – winners receive a printed-out coupon for the money owed that they can either redeem or put into other machines. The “high rollers” section of the slots offered $1,000 slot machines when the casino first opened (they have subsequently been removed). This was truly high stakes gambling at its finest – one pull, one grand.

Truly, the Borgata is trying to appeal to a consumer that Atlantic City does not normally attract. As Joel Naroff, chief economist at Commerce Bank puts it:
"It is clearly an attempt to change the image of Atlantic City. It's too long been the bus-trip capital of the world...How true that is is (sic) irrelevant. But it's an image that needs changing. If Atlantic City is going to distinguish itself, it is going to have to expand beyond gambling, and the Borgata, with its fancy restaurants and spa, may help do that...I can go to Las Vegas and not gamble and have a good time, whether it be in amusement parks or golfing or more shows. I might not take a whole vacation in Las Vegas, but if I'm out West, I would think of going there for a couple of days. Until now, that has not been the thought in Atlantic City" (Strauss, July 2003).

Changing Atlantic City's image and driving more high rollers to the city is going to make people want to stay longer. And that equals increased room rates. The rewards are clear: Deutsche Bank analyst Marc Falcone estimates that "an overnight customer spends $350 a day, a day-tripper does maybe $150 and a bus patron is only worth about $50 or $60. The Borgata and the residue it brings could really enhance things in Atlantic City" (Strauss, July 2003). Many of the other casinos in town realize that the Borgata's reinventing of Atlantic City means that they must also reinvent themselves, and have met the challenge that brings head-on.

**Following Suit**

Harrah's Inc. was the first company to recognize that it was time to spruce up the appearance of both of their casinos, Harrah's and the Showboat. Particularly of concern was the fact that the proverbial 400-pound gorilla known as the Borgata would be opening a stone's throw from Harrah's, the original "bay" casino. In an attempt to better
compete with its new neighbors, Harrah's built a $113 million dollar tower that opened in 2002. The new 25 story structure added 452 new rooms, upping their total to 1,626 (only a few hundred less than the Borgata). Indeed, there was no mistaking the motivation behind this construction; as General Manager David Jonas put it, "We want to make sure that when we open we can slug it out with these guys (the Borgata)" (Weinert, November 2001). The new addition has lights installed between the bedroom windows that put on a brilliant display of colors and patterns every night. The tower caters to the high roller customer that the "new" Atlantic City hopes to attract. Six "super suites" make up the entire top floor.

The three floors below it contain regular suites for the casino's average higher-end clientele. The rooms are, as one would assume, a step above the normal Harrah's hotel room, including marble entranceways, separate tubs and showers, as well as being slightly larger. Harrah's has also renovated their lobby, gaming floor, and dining areas. The entire area is done in aquas and corals, and is very reminiscent of an underwater seascape. The decorating is very delicate and understated, though unmistakably opulent. In a few short years, Harrah's has been able to reposition itself as an upper echelon casino that is prepared to handle the overnight accommodations that will come with the makeover of Atlantic City.

Harrah's other holding in Atlantic City, the Showboat, is also making strides to bring a more Vegas-style experience to their patrons. In January 2003 Showboat announced that it would be spending $33.8 million over 10 months in an attempt to turn the casino into a "lively tourist attraction" (Weinert, January 2003). Building upon their Mardi Gras/French Quarter-style, Showboat plans would improve their existing façade, and
build an open-air bar and lounge and a new food court, as well as increase their gaming area. Much like the Wild Wild West, Showboat’s frontage would be a cityscape. Along with this renovation comes expansion—last summer, Showboat opened their brand new $90 million tower. The tower adds 544 rooms to bring their total to 1,309, fourth overall and just behind their sister casino. Like at Harrah’s, the new rooms are an improvement over the old ones, each one complete with a large screen television, fancy entranceway and a spacious bathroom.

While Harrah’s is currently the only company to finish the additions to their existing casinos, they are by no means the last. Caesars, in an attempt to match the top-end shopping opportunities at the Borgata, has plans to create a premium shopping mall. The concept is an attraction unto itself—formerly known as the Shops at Ocean One, the mall is built over the beach and well into the ocean. Caesars purchased Ocean One, which is located directly across the Boardwalk from the casino, in 2003. Tentatively renamed the Pier at Caesars, the attraction is expected to cost $80 million. There are also plans in the works to add a 3,200 car parking garage with a 1,000 room tower on top of it.

The Pier will most likely draw its inspiration from The Forum Shops, the mall at Caesars’ sister hotel in Las Vegas. There, a faux Roman villa ambience is achieved with cobblestone walkways and ceilings painted and lit to look like a Tuscan sky at dusk. Most of the stores are more upscale than the average shopping mall, and the dining is of the highest caliber (Famous chef Wolfgang Puck owns two restaurants there). Like most places in Las Vegas, The Forum is an attraction unto itself. Along with the shopping and dining, there is an Imax 3-D theater, as well as a light and effects show based on the lost city of Atlantis that runs regularly. It is this type of Las Vegas-style spectacle for the
senses that will change the consensus that Atlantic City is a one-dimensional resort. Caesars is already doing its part – the casino is a tourist draw unto itself. The hotel boasts a Planet Hollywood chain, as well as a spot known as the Temple Bar that is a replica of a Parthenon-style temple from Roman times. The area surrounding it is built like a small city-state, with high pillars, statues, and (as in Vegas) a high ceiling that resembles a starry night sky. The author has yet to pass by the Temple Bar or the adjacent area without seeing a throng of tourists taking pictures of the structure or posing by some “stone” outcropping. With the addition of the Pier, Caesars is building itself into an Atlantic City powerhouse by bringing a part of Las Vegas to the Jersey Shore.

Another casino looking to take their viability to the next level is the venerable Resorts hotel. Resorts has a certain advantage over its competition – for this casino, the spectacle is not so much in the creation of a theme or attraction, but the building itself. The casino is one of the city’s last true ties with the salad days of the Boardwalk, before the advent of legalized gambling. The Chalfonte-Haddon has survived for over a century overlooking the Atlantic, and there is a certain wistful quality to the place. Instead of severing its ties to the past, the owners of Resorts have decided to embrace it. “Rather than building the Wild West or Jurassic Park or a Margaritaville, we’re taking what we’ve got … and just expanding it,” says Thomas Barrack Jr., chairman of Colony Capital LLC, which owns Resorts (Perskie, August 2003).

Their focus is on maintaining the dignity of the structure while bringing its level of luxury up to date. To that end, the company is investing $127 million in the project that will add a 400 room, 27-story tower to the hotel. The average room will be 512-576 square feet, making it the largest standard room in Atlantic City by about 100 square feet.
Each is elegantly appointed in marble and beach-styled interiors. There are 51 suites, each a whopping 1,000 square feet in size. The project will also add 13,700 square feet of gaming space to Resorts, as well as a new lobby, shopping area, and lounge. Resorts' approach is, in a way, refreshing; while they are building to address the needs of the overnight tourist, they are also attempting to single out the high roller who prefers to be pampered in a more muted atmosphere. This is in stark contrast to the monumental undertaking that is the Tropicana's The Quarter. The project, which has already seen its share of success and tragedy before it is even complete, is perhaps the loftiest design for making a run at the Borgata-style attraction market.

Tropicana's $245 million expansion project serves to reinforce the idea that the way of doing business in Atlantic City is about to change forever. Tropicana is already a titan among titans – once The Quarter is finished, the entire hotel/casino will cover 14 acres. The new structure will attempt to recreate the feel of Old Havana, back in the days that it was a sunny gambling resort. It will be the site of over 40 new shops, covering dining, entertainment, shopping, and spa treatments. Two New York institutions, The Palm and Carmine's, will have restaurants in The Quarter, as well as countless other regional and national dining establishments. There will be an IMAX theater, as well as a comedy club, live music bars, and multiple dance clubs. With this expansion the Tropicana adds 502 hotel rooms, 45,000 square feet of meeting space, and 2,400 new parking spaces.

Dennis Gomes, president of Resort Operations for Tropicana's parent company, Aztar Corporation, is crystal clear about The Quarter's true intention: "By offering a unique mix and critical mass of non-gaming options, the Tropicana becomes both the reason to believe in – and the reason to go to – Atlantic City" (PR newswire). Jeffrey Vassar,
executive director of The Atlantic City Convention and Visitors Authority, agrees: “Here is one casino property that sees what is happening in the marketplace, and recognizes that in order to be a full-service destination, we need to provide more than just gambling... What they are doing is just tremendous” (“A $245 million investment...,” October 2003).

One would be remiss to not mention the tragedy that befell Tropicana as part of the new parking deck collapsed on October 30, 2003, which killed 4 construction workers. The federal Occupational Safety & Health Administration is still investigating the collapse, and has until April 30, 2004 to report its findings. 33 days after the tragedy, workers resumed construction on The Quarter, but a timetable for when it will open has yet to be released. In fact, it took until January 16, 2004 for planning to begin to fully clear and reinforce the collapse area due to the ongoing OSHA investigation there. The stretch of Pacific Avenue that had been detoured since the tragedy finally reopened January 30th 2004.

Once Tropicana re-establishes a timetable and plans the opening of The Quarter, Atlantic City will have another true destination spot to rival those found at other casino sites. The Quarter will incorporate all of the facets of tourism that draw people to stay longer than a day – fine dining, exquisite shopping, the luxury of spa pampering, and multiple forms of entertainment, including, of course, gambling. The shape of Atlantic City is changing drastically; one needs only look to the skyline to see how the majority of the casinos are expanding and renovating to attract more consumers. Soon, there will be a reason to stay in the city that doesn’t involve a pull of a lever or a roll of the dice;
people will want to come to Atlantic City because, just maybe, there is so much to see and do.

**Walking The Walk**

It is important to note that, in keeping with the concept of Atlantic City having entertainment alternatives to gambling, there are is also a major non-casino initiative under way in the city. The advantage of this is twofold: first, consumers who are not interested in going to a casino have alternate locales in the city to frequent; second, it serves to further the renovation of Atlantic City as a whole, replacing urban blight with growth and opportunity.

As previously mentioned, the area at the terminus of the Atlantic City Expressway has been in desperate need of repair for quite some time. Keeping with the theme of Atlantic City providing a Vegas-style shopping experience, work is under way in turning this area into an upscale retail and entertainment destination. Dubbed The Walk, the eight-block area will be the home of 60 to 70 nationally known outlets. Restaurants and nightclubs are also part of The Walk, which will cost an estimated $76 million. The placement of The Walk is quite strategic – it is located almost exactly between The Atlantic City Convention Center/Sheraton Atlantic City, and the Boardwalk. It is also in walking distance from both the train and bus stations.

**Let It Ride**

Speaking of the train and bus stations, one of Atlantic City’s biggest advantages is its location and ease of visiting via its public transportation. Many people are unaware that
Atlantic City has its own international airport. The airport is a convenient 10 miles away from Atlantic City and covers 5,000 acres. Major airlines Spirit Airlines and Delta Connection (a shuttle service wing of Delta) fly out of Atlantic City. The airport’s revamped terminal, opened on May 7, 1996 with a pricetag of $8.5 million, can accommodate 1.3 million air passengers a year. Hertz, Avis, and Budget car rental companies have offices in ACIA.

If the visitor to Atlantic City is close enough to forego air travel, there are two public transportation alternatives – the bus or the train. NJ Transit offers the Atlantic City Line for those who wish to take the train. The line begins in Philadelphia’s 30th Street Station, with its terminus in Atlantic City. The Atlantic City train station opened its doors on May 22, 1989 as part of the new Convention Center complex. The station is within walking distance of the Boardwalk, but buses are also available. Even closer to the center of the city is the Bus Terminal, which is located next to The Walk. The relatively new terminal opened in 1997 and cost an estimated $7.5 million.

The three forms of transportation available in Atlantic City breaks down the “small time” stigma attached to the city. In order to be treated as a viable attraction-oriented destination, it is crucial to have the amenities associated with that label. Many companies are doing their part to bring non-gambling consumers to Atlantic City; from their decision to visit to their arrival should be as smooth as possible. The author has either heard first hand reports or been himself to all three travel stations, and can say without a doubt that utilizing any of the public transportation options is convenient, comfortable and efficient. They aid in positioning Atlantic City as a location that someone would travel some distance to visit.
Breaking the Bank

With all of the lofty plans of major corporations and the spectacle of reinventing a resort town that has been an attraction for decades, it is easy to lose sight of who are the real winners of a successful Atlantic City. Since the very beginning, gambling was hedged its bet, so to speak, with the promise of helping New Jersey’s elderly and disabled. And it has made good on its promise – since 1978, Atlantic City has generated $5.4 billion by earmarking 8% of casino gross gaming revenues towards the fund (Sokolic, May 2003). The pledge of helping those in need without resorting to a tax on the average resident was one of the pro-gaming forces’ strongest arguments. It worked on the basest of levels: the more that revenues increase, the more the fund for these deserving people increase. Of course, it would be folly to assume that multi-million dollar towers are springing up like dandelions all over Atlantic City for the sole purpose of charity. Casinos stand to make a great deal of money by making Atlantic City an attraction-based resort. However, the amount of tax revenue (both for the state and for the elderly/disabled fund) that can be made by convincing tourists to stay more than one day in Atlantic City is staggering.

Michael Pollock’s Gaming Industry Observer, a gambling analysis institution, offers compelling evidence in a May 2003 report that Atlantic City will be able to fulfill its promise to pro-gambling voters by raising funds for the needy like never before. The report acknowledges that Atlantic City is on the precipice of huge revenues due to all of the recent expansion. Without a tax increase, the state can increase its tax revenues by as much as $342 million over 2003-2005. The numbers grow astronomically when the idea of improvement over current numbers is factored in – in 2003, state tax revenues would have increased by as much as $689,000 by increasing gaming revenues by a scant 1/10 of
a percent. It was also estimated that every 100 hotel rooms added would increase tax revenues by $172,000. This number is quite impressive when considering that Tropicana and Resorts will add over 900 new rooms combined when they open their new towers. Beyond the state taxation, Pollock notes that in 2004 casino revenues should increase by roughly 8% (9.3% being the best case, 7% the worst case). That means that the fund for the elderly and disabled should also recognize substantial gains. The underlying point is that Atlantic City is nowhere near reaching its capacity for growth. This is a city that has never “experienced a year-to-year decline in annual revenue” (Michael Pollock’s...Examining tax revenues, 2003). In this type of environment, small investments in enticing people to stay overnight will equate to large returns. The best part is that Atlantic City is ready for this type of boom – all of the components are in place. The proliferation of hotel rooms that have opened and those to follow have the city primed for some huge wins. It is clear that increasing room rates is paramount to the success of Atlantic City and its new growth. Most importantly, by giving people a reason to stay, the casinos will be able to help the elderly and disabled more than ever before.

Summary/Conclusions

Bally’s finally touched off the long-awaited second wave of Atlantic City casino construction with its Wild Wild West casino. This was a place that was, in itself, an attraction. There were things to see and do that were not available anywhere else – the hotel remains one large photo opportunity. Soon after that, a new player would arrive in town, one that would change Atlantic City immediately – The Borgata. The Borgata
offered a Vegas-style experience, a hotel that catered to the wants of non-gambling tourists. Many of the other casinos realized that in order to compete, they would have to grow, and provide their customers with attractions and sensations that gambling did not.

It is common knowledge that the key to increasing revenues in Atlantic City hotels is by generating room usage. The only way to make tourists stay the night is to change the perception of Atlantic City as a gambling-only town. The Borgata and most of the other casinos are doing just that – turning Atlantic City into the type of place that there is simply too much to see and do in one day (See Figure 1). Statistics show that increasing room rates will generate more revenue, more jobs, and perhaps most importantly, more money for the fund to help the elderly and disabled.

Twenty-eight years into the gambling “experiment,” Atlantic City is at the most important crossroads of its existence. With all of the recent expansion, both in rooms and in attractions, the city has all of the tools available to become the type of tourist draw that Las Vegas is. The key to this is communicating all of the non-gambling alternatives that Atlantic City possesses. What follows is a study conducted by the author that looks into the average consumer’s attitudes towards Atlantic City, and the best way to market the town with an eye towards increasing room occupancy.
The "Bay" Casinos
(Located off the Boardwalk, northwest of Atlantic Avenue)

Figure 1: Atlantic City's Casinos

The Boardwalk Casinos
(Located on Atlantic Avenue, in order from south to north)

Chapter 4
A SURVEY POLLING PUBLIC OPINION REGARDING
CONSUMER PERCEPTION OF ATLANTIC CITY

Description of the Survey

The survey (see Appendix A) was comprised of ten statements that would gauge the respondent's conception of Atlantic City and the attractions available within. Respondents were given five options to express their own personal feelings towards the ten assertions: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral (no opinion), agree, and strongly agree.

Each of the ten statements of the survey represents a building block in the revitalization of Atlantic City through branding as an attraction-based resort. They elicit answers that the Subsidiary Questions put forth in Chapter 1. The statements either delve into a particular option that the city might wish to incorporate further into its resort concept, or a concept that must be broached before consumers will see Atlantic City as more than just a gambling town. The respondent was given the opportunity to write in any opinions/suggestions that he or she wished to, as well as four demographic questions (last time in Atlantic City, level of gambling, sex, and age). The author's true goal was to get to the root of what is currently stopping tourists from staying more than a day in Atlantic City, and what attractions would convince them to do so.

Sample
Any respondents that the author would solicit could drive to Atlantic City in a matter of hours due to his proximity to Atlantic City. Therefore, there was no limit to the type of person that could answer the survey. In the quest for statistical significance, the author was bound to survey at least 50 individuals. The nature of the survey – as well as Atlantic City’s push to become more avant-garde -- dictated that the most significant data would come from those between the ages of 21 and 59, certainly a formidable enough swath to ensure the proper amount of surveys. Also aiding the cause was the fact that for such a topic, one need not go to Atlantic City regularly, or at all, as long as he/she had an clear and cogent opinion about the area and/or legalized gambling. The statistics will prove this to be an accurate assumption.

Purpose of the Survey

The purpose of this survey is to go beyond theoretical musings of how the public will react to a revitalized Atlantic City and turn it into actual proof. It is very easy to argue that increased shopping areas will generate more tourists, but what if tourists don’t perceive Atlantic City as a place to find quality goods in the first place? All of this work by the casino industry and Atlantic City as a whole to redevelop the city is for naught if the target audience is not attuned to the message. This survey finds out if there is an existing desire to spend the night in Atlantic City, what can be done to foster these feelings, and how can the new growth best be communicated. As the reader will see, people’s opinions vary and conflict greatly in regards to Atlantic City. However,
regardless of positive or negative feelings towards the town, respondents for the most part are polarized by the subject. There is either great reverence or utter disdain for Atlantic City, and the survey was constructed to elicit such strong responses.

Analyzing the Results of the Survey

In all, the author collected 65 surveys from people that live from all parts of New Jersey, as well as some respondents from Philadelphia (See Appendix B). The comments ranged from expected ("they do need to clean the town up") to the poignant ("Atlantic City helps me forget my depression"). Except for the first question, which one respondent chose not to answer, the other nine questions were answered by everyone. As the reader will see, some questions have overwhelming responses in the positive or negative, where on others opinion is split down the middle.

For the purpose of this analysis and to facilitate more analytical discourse, the findings were expressed in a Likert Scale format (numerical rather than alphabetical) (See Appendix B). This was done to better gauge the average opinion of the group: that is to say, by switching the results to whole numbers the author was able to sum up the responses to the question and take the mean, achieving a more specific overall result. The translation is as follows:

- Strongly Disagree = 1
- Disagree = 2
- Neutral = 3
- Agree = 4
• Strongly Agree = 5

Therefore, under the numeric association, a statement receiving a low average number would show that the sample population did not agree with the concept put forth.

The four demographic questions show that the target market for the new attraction-based Atlantic City is well-represented. Over half of those taking the survey (60%) had been to Atlantic City in the last month or half-year, and a resounding 83% spend at least $400 per year gambling. Only 32% of the population was male, while 71% fall into the 21-50 age range that Atlantic City casinos are most concerned with attracting through their new construction. The sample provides keen insight into what the public thinks of Atlantic City, what they enjoy about it, what they do not, and what they would like to see in the future.

Statement 1: I would spend more than a day in Atlantic City

The most popular choice for this statement was "agree" (23 respondents), followed by "strongly agree" (18 respondents). Six people apiece either disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 11 respondents felt neutral towards the statement. The most striking statistic here is that 81% of the population was either amenable to the idea of spending more than a day in Atlantic City or had not formed a strong opinion either way. The average score for this statement was 3.64, the third highest average of the 10 questions.

However, of the respondents that would not spend more than a day in Atlantic City, many of them added comments that illustrate how strongly they felt about the town. One person quite eloquently stated that "(Atlantic City is) a gem surrounded by a bad scene."
Some respondents took that idea even further, calling Atlantic City “a corrupt gambling
‘ghetto’ city.”

Statement 2: I have taken/would take transportation other than my car
(Bus, Train, Plane) to get to Atlantic City

As mentioned previously, it is important to note that the respondents all live within
driving distance from Atlantic City, which may have skewed the results. However, the
author felt that many people, himself included, find that taking the train (or other means
of transportation) to Atlantic City is infinitely more convenient that driving there.

The results of this statement were quite surprising. The average score for Statement 2
was 3.02 – almost a perfect dichotomy between those who agreed and those who did not.
To wit, 15 people strongly agreed that public transportation was a viable option, while 15
strongly disagreed. Similarly, 14 people were in agreement with the statement, while 13
disagreed.

Upon further consideration, the variable of like/dislike for public transportation may
have played a part in this parity. People have strong opinions of public transportation
itself -- some people take the bus everywhere, some would not get on a plane for any
reason. While this does not in any way take away from the results found, it does explain
why the population was so split on this statement.

Statement 3: I have a favorite casino that I like to go to when I visit Atlantic City

This statement measures the patronage/allegiance that the respondents have previously
felt towards one specific casino. There are many reasons why someone would choose
one casino over another. For one, an individual might wish to associate himself/herself with the reputation of a certain casino (“I’m a Caesars man”). Secondly, one might be attracted to the theme of a certain casino (“The Wild Wild West is such a spectacle!”). Thirdly, a casino may be running certain promotional campaigns that draw a person to one establishment (“The Claridge sent me a coupon for $10”). Loyalties can be hard to break, and determining if the population already has some barriers to change built ahead of time is important.

According to this survey, the casinos should not be too concerned with this phenomenon. This statement averaged a perfect 3.00: complete neutrality. Twenty-seven respondents, or 42% of the population, did not feel any devotion one way or the other to any casino. An extra 28%, or 18 respondents, disagreed with the idea of staying with one particular casino. In other words, only 30% of those surveyed displayed any sort of casino loyalty. This in itself is extremely important, and speaks volumes to the opportunity for each and every casino right now.

Statement 4: I would rather plan a trip to Foxwoods or Mohegan Sun than Atlantic City

It was the author’s impression that this statement would be the one most influenced by the respondent’s location. For a good portion of the survey sample, a trip up north to the two reservation casinos would be roughly the same time and distance to Atlantic City. While Atlantic City faces competition in many forms, Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun are the ones that are offering the closest substitute to what the shore casinos have.

Almost half of the population surveyed (31 respondents) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Add in those who took a neutral position (21 respondents),
and the percentage rises to 80% of those polled who would not rather go to the
reservation casinos. Only 5 respondents strongly agreed with this statement; 8
respondents chose “agree.”

Statement 5: With the creation of the Borgata and expansion of many of its casinos,
I want to go to Atlantic City and see what’s new.

This statement gets to the heart of Atlantic City’s crusade. All of this expansion and
the creation of the Borgata is predicated on the idea that, to quote from “Field of
Dreams,” “If you build it, they will come.” Within a year or two, Atlantic City will look
completely different than from any other time in its existence. It is vital that the
population at large gets excited about what is happening, and makes the effort to go see
what all of the noise is about.

Of the 65 people surveyed, 34 (52%) agreed with the statement. Ten more strongly
agreed that they were interested in seeing what the new Atlantic City had to offer. In
sum, this means that 68% of the survey population has a certain level of enthusiasm about
all of the new construction. Only eight people reported having no interest in seeing what
Atlantic City had to offer (5 respondents disagreed; 3 respondents strongly disagreed).
That leaves 20% of those surveyed (13 respondents) for whom the new construction has
no impact on their opinion. The average score for this statement was 3.66, the second
highest score registered.
Statement 6: I would go to Atlantic City if they offered sports gaming

For some time this has been considered one of Atlantic City's disadvantages: they do not offer sports gambling in any way, shape, or form. Gambling on a wide array of sporting events is one of the staples of Las Vegas, and would be a large revenue boost to the casinos. Fear of regulation has kept it out of Atlantic City; however, there are many that feel that it would be a welcomed addition to the array of games the casinos provide.

The most popular response to this statement was "neutral," which is what 22 respondents (34% of the survey population) chose. The next two highest choices were "disagree" (15 subjects) and "strongly disagree" (13 subjects). Only 6 respondents strongly agreed with the statement, with the remaining 9 respondents agreeing with it.

One person noted that "sports gaming would 'blow away' all eastern competition."

While this may be true, the sampling did not feel the same way; in all, 77% either felt that sports gaming would not bring them to Atlantic City, or that it wouldn't change their decision to go one way or the other. The average score for this statement was 2.69, the third lowest score registered.

Statement 7: As many famous entertainers perform in Atlantic City casinos as any other stadium/theater

There has long been a preconceived notion that Atlantic City no longer draws a high level of entertainment to its casinos. With the advent of the Borgata, which has begun to bring in stars from all walks of show business, that stigma is beginning to change. This statement does not so much try to find out if more people would come to Atlantic City if
the level of entertainment was higher; instead, it attempts to discern what public opinion of the talent situation currently is.

Public opinion (or the survey respondent’s opinion, at any rate) seems to be split. The average score for this statement was 3.05, hovering just above the survey midpoint. The results show that 27 respondents agreed with the statement, while 20 disagreed. Part of this dichotomy could be due to the concept of “famous entertainers.” Perhaps the proliferation of entertainment that was popular years ago appeals to the older demographics, while the 21-30 age group would not be interested in seeing that type of show. However, it should be noted that neither side was particularly passionate either way – only 2 respondents strongly agreed, and only 4 respondents strongly disagreed.

The casinos would hope one comment recorded resonates with other tourists: “I usually only consider gambling, but if entertainers, i.e. musicians, were performing I would also go…”

**Statement 8: I would enjoy going to a semi-professional sporting event**

*(Baseball, Hockey) during a trip to Atlantic City*

Few people out of the region might know that Atlantic City has both a minor league hockey and baseball team. The Boardwalk Bullies, part of the East Coast Hockey League, play their home games in the historic Boardwalk Hall (original home of the Miss America Pageant). Though only in their second season, they have already risen to a high level of play, winning the 2003 Kelly Cup, the highest prize in their league. The Atlantic City Surf is a member of the Atlantic League of Professional Baseball Clubs. The team
calls Sandcastle Stadium its home; the $14.5 million, 5,900 seat stadium is only a few minutes away from the casinos.

Most respondents agreed with the individual who stated that he/she was "not so hot on semi-professional sports." The results show that 18 respondents disagreed with the statement, while 8 strongly disagreed. Factor in the 15 individuals who were neutral to the idea of attending a sporting event, and that totals to 63% of the survey population who are either impassive or not interested in the Bullies or the Surf. The average score for this statement was 2.94, slightly below the "indifference line" of 3.00.

These scores point to a bigger problem regarding the interest level of most individuals towards semi-professional sports. Indeed, a relatively obscure form of entertainment is not going to attract new customers, and sadly, the Bullies and the Surf fall into that category. It is more a function of those franchise's problems, rather than the relationship between Atlantic City and sporting events.

Statement 9: When I go to Atlantic City, I usually try to spend

some time at the beach or go on a fishing trip

Perhaps Atlantic City's most obvious differentiation between itself and its competitors is the Atlantic Ocean and miles of beaches. One can list all of the ways in which Las Vegas is more of a tourist destination than Atlantic City, but Vegas is in the middle of a dusty desert. Back before gambling, Atlantic City's main draw was the beach, as well as the opportunity to go fishing, whale-watching, or just boating around the island. On a hot summer day, few things compare to walking the beach or taking a cool dip. The author
assumed that this statement would score relatively high, considering the throngs of
beachgoers he has witnessed on a regular basis during the summer.

In a complete surprise, this statement received the lowest score out of all ten
statements, a 2.52. The survey showed that 22 respondents disagreed with the idea of
going to the beach or fishing, with an extra 16 respondents strongly disagreeing. These
figures are compounded by the 10 individuals who registered a neutral response. That
equates to 74% of the population surveyed who do not see Atlantic City as a New Jersey
“shore town.” As one respondent put it, “(Atlantic City) is like Vegas, it’s not a shore
point any longer.” Of the 17 remaining surveys collected, 11 people agreed with the
statement, with only 6 people (9%) strongly agreeing that they try to spend some time on
the beach or in the ocean.

Statement 10: A popular perception – if not a popular misconception –
is that Atlantic City’s main attraction is gambling

Clearly, this is the finale question, and indeed, the one that this entire thesis is
predicated upon. Since its inception, Atlantic City has been looked upon as a city whose
sole draw is legalized gambling. That is why there was so much fear that the city was
lost when gambling was voted down in 1974 – without it, the public saw Atlantic City as
a dead end, even back then. The recent renovation of the city is being done to combat
that very opinion – therefore, the powers that be must be under the impression that the
majority feels that there is nothing to do in Atlantic City except gamble.

This was the one statement that almost every respondent agreed upon, as well as
provided the most commentary about. The results are overwhelming – almost everyone
feels that the heart of Atlantic City is legalized gambling. A full 32 individuals strongly agreed with the statement, or 49%. Those who agreed with the statement totaled 26 respondents in all. Combined, that means that 89% of the survey population felt that Atlantic City's main attraction is gambling. The average score for the statement was 4.32, by far the largest score for any of the statements. The comments provided by the survey population give even more insight into what the average respondent was thinking. One person commented that "it could be a fun day out to include food, a show and gambling. More attractions attract more people like Vegas." Others recognized that Atlantic City needed to change this overall opinion, asserting that "there needs to be more activities to draw me there." Another respondent echoes this sentiment: "I think I would go more often if there were more to see besides casinos." However, there was one comment that truly reverberates, and shows that Atlantic City, while not perfect, still in mid-construction, and still with a distance to go, is moving towards transforming into the attraction-based resort town that it has the potential to become: "(I) think they are doing a nice job cleaning up (Atlantic City). It will be a wonderful place in years to come."

Summary/Conclusions

The author prepared and distributed a survey that proposed to shed some light on what individuals truly thought about Atlantic City, and what it would take to convince them to spend more than one day there. The author collected 65 surveys, covering a wide range of ages, casino usage, and gambling preferences. Some of the results were quite surprising, while other fell in line exactly with what the public at large was perceived to
believe. What the author discovered through this process will be more thoroughly fleshed out in the next chapter. For now, it can be said that these results helped the author gain a better understanding of what Atlantic City needs to do to re-brand itself, and will offer recommendations based on his research, his understanding of the situation, and the data gathered from the above survey.
Chapter 5
RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

The recent construction activity in Atlantic City is supposed to be the city’s great leap forward into the stratus currently occupied solely by Las Vegas. However, before moving forward, it is important to take a step back, and recognize that certain demons have to be exorcized from the mind of the average tourist. If the survey taught the author anything, it’s that the canard of Atlantic City being simply one-dimensional is alive and well. People tend to think that Atlantic City has almost none of the benefits of Las Vegas sans the gambling. Relatedly, another lesson learned from the survey is that casinos should consider it open season on its competitors’ clientele. There is little allegiance to any one casino, meaning that whoever offers the most perceived benefit is going to get the business.

Conclusion 1: Change is good

The survey illustrates that people are interested in what is new in Atlantic City. Riding the wave of good publicity is paramount to the success of the changes. This is a situation where the sum of the whole is greater than its parts. The more casinos that have something new and different to offer, the more tourists will be interested in going to Atlantic City and seeing all of the new attractions. For example, someone who goes to see the Borgata for the first time may wish to stay and shop at the Walk, check out the light show at Harrah’s, or see an IMAX show at Tropicana. Almost every casino on the boardwalk and on the bay are renovating in one way or another, primarily due to
increased competition from the Borgata. Casinos have to find new ways to improve their existing locations. One way this is being done is through the beach bar. Banned for years, Hilton, Caesars, and Trump Plaza will soon be offering guests the ability to sit on a deck by the ocean and enjoy a cold beverage. Redenia Gilliam Mosee, senior vice president for Park Place Entertainment (owners of both the Hilton and Caesars) calls the bars “an amenity that’s been requested by our guests” (Curran, May 8), and any visitor to Atlantic City would understand why. Go to any casino’s bar, and one would see a packed area. What if they could take the bar out of the dark, smoky confines, and into a sunny beachfront? These three casinos will have a hook, something that the other casinos don’t.

That’s exactly what consumers want to see – a different way to have fun in Atlantic City. Every casino should be striving to providing customers with more than just a place to gamble. Offering a change of activity is going to create positive word of mouth, and bring more people down to see what there is to see and do in Atlantic City. The more there is to do, the greater the possibility that they will not be able to do it all in one day; they will have to stay the night to get the full Atlantic City “experience.”

Conclusion 2: There is strength in numbers

It is important to realize that certain corporations own multiple casinos, or have strategic alliances with other ones. This means that competition is intensified because certain casinos have not only their own structure to offer, but the services and attractions of their “rivals.” A perfect example of this is Park Place International, which owns the Hilton, Bally’s, and Caesars casinos. If you have a player’s card at one, you can use your comp points (“dollars”) built up by gambling that can be used like money for food,
entertainment, or lodging) towards any of the three. That means that even if there is brand loyalty for one, the other two can expect to get some residual business as well. In a similar fashion, Showboat and Harrah's are owned by the same company, as is obviously the three Trump properties. For a long time, these casinos operated separately from one another; however, once mega-resort Borgata was opened, it was clear that to compete, this had to change.

The survey established that there is not much differentiation between casinos in the minds of consumers. That being said, the prevailing thought in the mind of the tourist is "what have you done for me lately?" Even though a consumer might not have a predilection towards the Hilton, Caesars or Bally's, if he/she knows that they can gamble in any of the three and use their comp points at the other two, that becomes a perceived value.

In Atlantic City, one can walk from the Sands to Claridge to Caesars to Bally's without ever stepping foot outside – they are all attached to one another. That means that, for all intents and purposes, parking at one is like parking at all four. The survey shows that people are willing to spend more than a day in Atlantic City if they are given a sufficient reason to. The convenience of four casinos put together means that if there is a draw in one, those staying/visiting the others will have quick access to it. Alliances have been part of the new rejuvenation of Atlantic City and, based on the opinions expressed in the survey, they are here to stay.
Conclusion 3: No fun for the Sun

According to the survey, Atlantic City is still the king of the East, and that northern competitors Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun do not have its drawing power. However, it would be folly to completely discount these resorts, particularly Mohegan Sun. Instead, Atlantic City casinos should try to learn from them, and offer a similar product before tourists decide to change their vacation plans. A brief description of the entranceway alone might be enough to send consumers northbound:

“You step inside the Mohegan Sun and you think you're in another world. Maybe it's because of the 55-foot waterfall in the concourse and the 60-foot mountain of onyx and alabaster overlooking the casino. Maybe it's because of the planetarium dome. Maybe it's because Glen Campbell is playing a free concert in the center of the casino floor...You settle in your room, with its standard 9-foot ceilings and three two-line telephones, and realize this really is a place to relax and not some cookie-cutter dormitory for gamblers.”
(Weinert, December 2002)

For perspective, consider that Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods together draw about half as much slot revenue as all of the Atlantic City casinos combined. And Mohegan Sun, despite being smaller than Foxwoods, is about to collect more slot revenues than Foxwoods for the first time. Mohegan Sun offers fine shopping, a spa, top-notch dining, a nightclub, 100,000 square feet of meeting space, and a WNBA team all under one roof. Add to this the car trip which is done mostly on a four lane highway with almost no traffic lights, and you have a disaster waiting to happen for Atlantic City. As one
respondent commented, sports gaming would give Atlantic City an advantage not shared by its Eastern competition (even though the survey illustrated a lack of interest in sports gaming, the windfall enjoyed by Las Vegas due to this type of gambling would say otherwise). Competing with Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods head on is the only option—ignoring them would lead to even more revenue lost. It is imperative that the city goes full speed ahead with its renovations, to prevent the survey’s finding from becoming the exception to the rule.

Conclusion 4: No shore or scores

Apparantly, by the results of the survey, semi-professional sports and the allure of the ocean are not viable answers for Atlantic City. Attendance numbers for the Surf and the Bulldogs would probably echo that statement. When in Atlantic City, people want a spectacle, and minor league sports do not necessarily qualify. The beach apparently does not either, as it scored extremely low in the survey. Most of the improvements to Atlantic City have to do with creating excitement—dramatic architecture, the best in entertainment and dining—things that elicit a certain response. It is a response that cannot be achieved with minor league sporting events or a trip to the beach.

In regards to popular entertainment, the survey results prove that Atlantic City is currently in a transition period with regards to booking more famous names. The Borgata has begun to bring more well-known celebrities to the area, and the other casinos are scrambling to follow suit. It will be interesting to see that as time goes by, if the response to that particular statement (as many famous entertainers perform in Atlantic City casinos as any other stadium/theater) trends upward.
Concerning the survey’s discovery that people don’t go to Atlantic City for the shore, it should be noted that even the beach bar, located on directly on the beach, isn’t exactly a beach destination. Alcohol is not permitted on the boardwalk or the beach, only in the bar. In other words, it is more for the enjoyment of the weather and the scenery than actually swimming in the ocean or getting a tan. People want a sensory experience, like the one they would get in Las Vegas. Right now, Atlantic City is trending in that direction, and unfortunately that appears to not include local sports teams or the ocean.

**Conclusion 5: There are walls that must be broken down**

It came as little surprise to the author that respondents to the survey almost unanimously agreed that most people see gambling as Atlantic City’s main attraction. Because as of this moment, people would be correct in that assumption. Most of the big draws that Atlantic City is counting on have not opened as of this writing. The casinos have to deal with the fact that visitors have been coming to their business for over two decades to gamble. Those people do not imagine the idea of Atlantic City being able to provide anything else. Most of them see the town as dirty, corrupt, and a place where one’s children would not be safe. Suffice to say, Atlantic City is in need of a serious image overhaul.

It is the author’s opinion that a major advertising campaign that shows all that there is to do in the city is a crucial step in changing consumer attitudes. While doing research, the author discovered that in the middle of October 2003, Atlantic City unveiled its new theme—“Atlantic City, Always Turned On.” Aside from the questionable taste of the slogan, the author had never seen it (along with a new city logo) on any media of any
sort. To have such a shocking dearth of advertising, particularly in both the New York and Philadelphia markets, is a complete mistake. If people could see more visuals of the “new” Atlantic City, such as the Borgata or the new towers on the boardwalk, they would be more likely to visit. The author would suggest a campaign focusing primarily on print and outdoor media, similar to the northern casino’s strategy. Radio advertising, being able to reach consumers in their car, letting them know how close Atlantic City is, could also be an incisive way to get the word out.

In this vein, Atlantic City could partner with NJ Transit to provide specials to people who take the train or bus. This would also help to raise public transportation, which had almost as many detractors as proponents in survey respondents. Signage on trains and buses would also help raise awareness of direct lines to Atlantic City. The theme of this communications plan should echo the sentiment evoked in the latest round of Las Vegas advertisement – the idea that Vegas is a place to break away from the norm, to have fun and be a little indulgent and above all treat yourself. The Las Vegas television ads cater to the people whose opinions are expressed in the survey. Atlantic City should provide a similar communications “face” to the public. The bottom line is that word of mouth is the beginning of good publicity, but it should not be the end. There are many avenues of communication that the city of Atlantic City needs to explore to shake the misconception that gambling is the only activity it can offer.
Atlantic City is primed for big changes in the way people see it, and the reason that they visit. It is imperative at this juncture that the proper message is put out through multiple pipelines that gambling is not the sole draw to the city. People are looking for the glitz and glamour of Las Vegas close to home and Atlantic City has taken steps to become that type of destination. It needs to be publicized that change is afoot. A wise man once said that true change comes from within, and in Atlantic City it is no exception. However, construction and renovation is not the only way to grow. Strategic alliances between casinos give all involved a chance to profit. In that way, all casinos must work together to give the tourist a well-rounded experience in Atlantic City, each providing something that would attract people from across the country to visit.

This has to be done now more than ever, as Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun to the north attempt to outstrip Atlantic City as the place on the east coast to gamble and have a good time. The small town allures of minor league sports and frolicking in the ocean are simply not enough anymore. Atlantic City must be ready to create true "big time" attractions, and communicate them to the public. The more that they spread the word about what Atlantic City has become, the more people will come, by car, bus, train, or plane, staying days on end; increasing revenues for the casinos, the city, the state, and of course, those who Atlantic City has always promised to serve, New Jersey’s elderly and disabled.
Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

_The Golden Giant_

The way to the Borgata has been simplified by the creation of a tunnel that runs under the bay. It is right off of the Expressway, and turned what was a trip of excess traffic lights and inconvenience into a handful of minutes. What first grabs the eye when approaching the Borgata, aside from its size, is the amount of land that it stands on. Acres of trees and walkways surround the building, the only casino to have this luxury. Both Harrah’s and the Trump Marina, large casinos in their own right, hide behind the Borgata like wary schoolchildren. They flank Atlantic City's thirteenth casino, one to the left, one to the right, and add perspective to the enormity that is the Borgata.

The feeling of first walking into the Borgata can only be described as electric. It is the kind of place that one gets the feeling of activity, of having more planned than one actually does. Just being in that environment serves to convince people that they need a $90 steak or a $500 handbag. The Borgata is sensual in the strictest definition of the word. The gaming floor is circular, with a walkway going around the circumference; taking this tour is treating oneself to all sorts of stimuli. Walk one way and see the shimmering waterfall or the wall of never-ending color change. Smell the gourmet cuisine, or just a burger on the grill at the “casual” restaurant. Try not to gawk too long at the “Borgata Babes:” just be cool, bro, act natural, like you’ve seen it all before. After all, this is the Borgata, kid, the big leagues – your next fortune is just waiting, sitting patiently on the craps table. There’s live music coming from someplace, but it’s hard to
figure out exactly. The box office's plasma screens are announcing that your favorite singer is coming to town. Really, he is coming all the way down here? I didn't know Atlantic City brought out the talent. The escalators straight ahead lead to the Spa floor. Hm, a massage? Hell, Sinatra must've enjoyed a schvitz and a rubdown every once and a while, right? It would be a good idea to catch a drink at the bar, the one right in the center of the casino floor, with the dark linen hanging down for walls. It could be noon on Wednesday and it would feel like a midnight on Saturday in a New York club. It just gives off a vibe that it is a hip place and if someone is drinking there, he/she by extension are hip as well.

There are small details too — for example, the dice are golden. How perfect is that? It is almost a touch unsettling, as if the shooter is tempting the fates too much. However, this is Atlantic City, and not taking a gamble in Atlantic City would be like, well, not taking in oxygen anywhere else. There are a couple of entertainers, those people that pretend to be statues and scare the tourists every few seconds. The funniest thing is watching their shit end; they become regular people again, being escorted by security to their dressing room. How do they do that? The must go into a trance or something. But isn't everyone here, one way or the other, in a trance? That is the other side of the Borgata — once you go in, you really do not want to leave. It feels like the moment you get into your car, the party is going to kick into high gear and you will be left wondering what you missed. There is a sense of familiarity to that, that aura of endless possibilities that wraps around the Borgata like the purple neon that lights the casino up at night. And then, suddenly, the pieces come together, and the full picture can be recognized, like one of those photographs where you have to relax your eyes to see it.
Las Vegas.

That is what the Borgata is reminiscent of, that first time on the strip where everyone is abuzz and all one can think about is what to do next. This is the new Atlantic City – a place where anything is possible. A place where people can gamble, but not where gambling is the only thing to do. Entertainment, dining, dancing, shopping, gaming: a total resort town. The vision is clear, and the wheels are in motion. Those who are not on board the train should be prepared to be run over by it. Atlantic City sits poised to succeed where it has failed for so many years, to shrug off the stigma of being old, and boring, and dirty. Then, and only then, can it replace that image with one of the growth, the opportunity for fun and diversion, and the total resort experience that Atlantic City has yearned for so long to be.

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The Future of Atlantic City

The final question surrounding the Atlantic City renaissance is a simple one – Will it work? The citizens of Atlantic City have heard this type of optimism more than they care to admit. How many times can one say “THIS is the time when Atlantic City turns it all around” before the words lose all meaning? In 1976, the thought was that the legalization of Atlantic City was going to lead to the rebuilding of the city. After that, 1990 was supposed to be year of the casino revolution. What this thesis did not include is the staggering number of companies and entrepreneurs who came into town promising to restore Atlantic City to its previous glory, but for one reason or another either never
started construction or even had to stop in mid-construction. One example of this is the ill-fated Playboy hotel and casino, which was eventually finished by Donald Trump and now stands as an additional tower of the Plaza. The point is that false hope is a commodity that has been in abundance in Atlantic City, and not just at a roulette wheel or a poker table. So, will all of these changes convince people, at long last, that there is a reason to stay for an extended vacation in Atlantic City?

The answer is a resounding yes. Will Atlantic City ever become the attraction powerhouse that Las Vegas has become? It probably will not, at least not in the current wave of construction. Of course, it is important to keep everything in perspective. Las Vegas is a town that was built in the middle of nowhere for the sole purpose of gambling. True, it grew itself into much more than that over the years, but at least it started with the vision of entertaining tourists. Atlantic City used gambling as an urban renewal plan, a tricky proposition at best. Short of leveling the entire town, one can not escape the fact that Atlantic City is an old town, and the years have taken their toll. However, this time in the city’s history, the regeneration is on too large of a scale to ignore. The Taj Mahal was one casino being built, and aside from a few name restaurants, did not offer anything that its competitors did not. What is happening now is a full scale revamping of most casinos’ philosophies, and new growth to fit fresh thinking. This is a better environment for change to occur, and the room rates for each casino will reflect that. To think that it will instantly turn Atlantic City into the El Dorado of the eastern seaboard is a touch premature. Michael Pollock sums it up best: “I’m not the first to use the analogy, but if Las Vegas is like Disney World, Atlantic City is Disneyland...If I’m looking for a gaming vacation, I will go to Vegas. But just like the family in Los Angeles, I will think
about going to Atlantic City for a day if I am a few hours away in New York or Washington or Philadelphia" (Strauss, July 2003).

Only time will tell if the Borgata truly becomes the boost to Atlantic City that has inspired so much change and high hopes. What is important is that for the first time in many years there is something being done to change Atlantic City. The only question remaining is how many more tourists and overnight guests will the recent renovation draw. Pollock is optimistic: "If the Borgata allows Atlantic City to attract more of those people with just a little bit of time on their hands -- all right, so it's not the international crowd in Las Vegas, but it's a pretty good market...Add in Springsteen and McCartney and some more events and, well, you have something a whole lot better going on" (Strauss, July 2003).

Hope is a hard commodity to come by in Atlantic City. In 1976, New Jersey hoped that legalized gambling would be the tonic to a city in crisis. Sure, the dream has languished a bit, and Atlantic City is still a punch line in a comedian's routine every now and again. However, it does not always have to be that way. Now the hope takes on a different meaning. It is a hope for more than just busloads of people spending six hours in a smoky slot parlor. Hope has sprung anew, and the idea that Atlantic City can be a true resort town has taken a new fervor. Soon, all of the amenities that make a resort town hustle and bustle will be at the fingertips of every visitor to Atlantic City. The future is now, and the resort town that dubbed itself "America's Playground" will be able to look at what's to come with newfound hope.

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The Way Home

It is very hard to look back when one is leaving Atlantic City. Since the entire boardwalk casinos are in a row, once you are on your way to the Expressway, Atlantic City is completely behind you. In a way, this is a good thing; unlike Las Vegas, with its slot machines in the airport, once someone walks away with their winning or losses, there is a certain finality to it. The last building before the Expressway is that shark tooth, the visitor’s center trapped on the island, surrounded by the relentless ebb and flow of traffic. Win or lose, Atlantic City can be an exciting town. It is something different; there is not a substitute for the casino experience. Now that tired, overused word rears its head again – hope. The casinos are teeming with it, and all of the growth only fuels the fire. Driving away from it, the anticipation of fast fortunes and high times linger in the air slightly before they dissipate, at least until the next time. With one last quick look in the rearview mirror, at the towers of greed and desire and, above all else, hope, the toll is paid and the visitor is ready to move on.


*Casino Gambling in Atlantic City: A Sure Bet for Whom?*

http://www.asu.edu/caed/proceedings99/NELSON/NELSON.HTM.

*Chequers – Piccolo’s AC History.*


Michael Pollock’s Gaming Industry Observer (2003). Examining incremental state tax revenues from Atlantic City growth without any tax increases, levying taxes on slot leases.


Topping-off ceremony for Tropicana's The Quarter indicates brisk pace for $225 million expansion project; final beam in place means New Jersey's largest hotel is nearly complete. (2003, August 28). *Associated Press Article*.

Tropicana Casino and Resort poised to become east coast's most diverse and exciting gaming and entertainment resort destination. (2003, October 14). *Associated Press Article*.


*All logos used in Figure 1 are taken from each casino's respective homepage*
Appendix A

Survey
Based on the scale below, please circle the answer that most closely represents your opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SA Strongly Agree</th>
<th>A Agree</th>
<th>N Neutral</th>
<th>D Disagree</th>
<th>SD Strongly Disagree</th>
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</table>

1. I would spend more than a day in Atlantic City

2. I have taken/would take transportation other than my car (bus, train, plane) to get to Atlantic City

3. I have a favorite casino that I like to go to when I visit Atlantic City

4. I would rather plan a trip to Foxwoods or Mohegan Sun than Atlantic City

5. With the creation of the Borgata and expansion of many of its casinos, I want to go to Atlantic City and see what’s new

6. I would go to Atlantic City more if they offered sports gaming

7. As many famous entertainers perform in Atlantic City casinos as any other stadium/theater

8. I would enjoy going to a semi-professional sporting event (Baseball, Hockey) during a trip to Atlantic City

9. When I go to Atlantic City, I usually try to spend some time at the beach or go on a fishing trip

10. A popular perception -- if not a popular misconception -- is that Atlantic City’s main attraction is gambling

Please offer any additional comments that you have regarding Atlantic City


Please answer any, some, or none of the questions.

Circle which description is most accurate

I have been to Atlantic City:
Within the last month
Within the last six months
Within the last year
Within the last two years
Within the last three years
It has been over three years

I gamble:
Infrequently  (-$200 per year)
Casually       ($200-$400 per year)
Regularly      ($401-$1000 per year)
Ardently       ($1000+ per year)
I don't gamble

Gender:       Male       Female

Age:          21-30      31-40      41-50
               51-60      61-70      70 or above
Appendix B

Analysis of Survey
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
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Total Points: 233 196 169 238 175 198 191 164 281
Average points: 3.64 3.07 2.60 2.66 2.60 2.95 2.52 4.32
Notes:

1. The respondent’s usage of Atlantic City (Q1) is expressed in fractions of a year when the answer was less than one year, i.e. within the last month = .08, and within the last six months = .50

2. Q2 is expressed in dollars spent per year gambling