

Steve Cutler Day in Las Vegas!

by Jim Follis

You would have thought that October 11, 2002 was his *special* day, and although it was not his birthday, it was still, very much in deed, his special Day! Here it was, the culmination of months and months of hard work. Of tedious coordinative efforts. Of complicated schedule manipulations. Schedule refinements, adjustments and wholesale last minute changes. But for all that work; the hundreds of telephone calls, the personal tours and the unexpected, yet anticipated, cancellations, October 11th was indeed Steve Cutler Day.

And to prove it, the Honorable Oscar Goodman, Mayor of Las Vegas (a bit of Vegas histrionics himself) had issued and signed into effect, a Proclamation that October 11, 2002 was to officially be known as, Steve Cutler Day. Why October 11th? Why Steve Cutler? Well that's because Steve himself, as well as his already established affiliated the Tropicana Hotel and Casino, is becoming an integral part of Las Vegas history. Of course Steve's involvement is that of having a prized collection of gaming memorabilia which centers on the gaming history of Nevada and in particular, Las Vegas.

Most of us know Steve as the Curator of the Gambling Museum located at the Tropicana Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas, Nevada, which for



the past four years has stood as the Temple of every chip and token collector in the World. It is the center of the gaming memorabilia universe, and we are all somewhat envious of Steve's ability to showcase his collection (or nearly 10 %) in front of a non-collecting audience and very much in a museum setting.

However, the word "museum" is not what Steve uses to denote the facility, tucked away inside the aging Tropicana, just past the Slots Promotion booth, and past the casino gift store. And further still, past a namesake Legend's Deli, through the museum gift store, and if you make a wrong turn, you end up in the Sports Books. But once you find it, you will soon discover that the museum's more publicized and formal name is the Casino Legends Hall of Fame.

Quite a mouth-full, but then the Hall of Fame has much to boast of, not to mention it's annual tradition of Hall of Fame Induction ceremonies. Which as it happened, October 11th happened to be this year's ceremony. Although the Mayor's Office proclaimed that day to be Steve Cutler Day, every time there is an Induction ceremony, each time seems to be Steve Cutler Day.

It was great honor for me (and my wife and son) to be invited to this year's ceremony, and I wanted to share a little bit with you, the reader, about the events of this most recent ceremony. I won't be able to remark on the ability of others to be included in future events, as my own participation has evolved over the years. In the beginning, the Hall of Fame Induction ceremonies included being Open to the Public. Starting with this year's event, that is no longer the case. But my first participation was as a stand-in-line, wait for a leftover, unused seat, which of course was in the back; the way waaaay back, of the Tiffany Theater.

Now the Tiffany Theater of course is home to the Tropicana's renown Folies Bergere Review, and because the Tropicana, in association with Steve Cutler, have developed the Casino Legends Hall of Fame program, it is only fitting that the induction ceremonies take place in a

comparable, legendary theater, like the Tiffany Theater. But for my first Induction ceremony, it may as well have been the Chicago Stockyards; I was simply one of the tourist cows, roaming the back area corral, fenced off from the invited guests, paparazzi and honorees. But just the same, it was cool!

Some time later, I recall having a conversation with Steve at the Legends Deli while he was taking a break from his then involvement with the Hall of Fame gift store, about my John Q. Public attendance at the ceremony. I remember saying that it was cool, but I'd sure like to be on the other side of the corral. I was pleasantly surprised when Steve offered an invitation for the next go-round and I was quite chagrined to miss the event. (Shame on me!) I then had to beg my way in to the next event, which was cooler still.

The October 11th event was my fourth, and it was the best yet! After a big format change, I think that Steve and the Tropicana have hit upon something that can become a spectacular celebration, even for Las Vegas. Previously, the event included a guest speaker/host, who would announce the Inductees, one by one, have them come up front (from back stage) and present them with their certificate. After a brief acceptance speech it was on to the next Inductee.

This year it was quite different. After a few opening remarks from Hector Mon, President, Tropicana Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas, who then announced a new Lifetime Achievement recognition award, named after its first recipient, Mr. Joe Delaney, a well known and highly regarded Journalist in Las Vegas. The award was received by Delaney's daughter, Ms. Kathleen Delaney, as Joe had passed away some months earlier.

Attentions then shifted to Steve Cutler who was presented with Mayor Goodman's Proclamation, along with Certificates of Recognition from two of the Senatorial and House of Representatives Congressmen for the State of Nevada, Steve then took the stage and after a few short remarks the program was off and running. Unlike all past events, this Induction ceremony was being video taped as a possible future television offering. To start things off, and keep the show rolling, Las Vegas icon and entertainment personality Clint Holmes was acquired as the Emcee/Master of Ceremonies.

The first presenter, Bob Anderson was introduced, who then introduced Mafalda as the first Inductee. Mafalda, for those who may not recognize the name, is an accomplished pianist who has spent a great deal of her career in the Vegas scene. Of course there was a piano nearby and Mafalda showed everyone that

after all these years, she still knew how to excite the Ivories.

Clint Holmes then reclaimed the stage and introduced Rich Little as the next presenter and after a few trademark impressions (yes, even the loose jowled Richard Nixon, quickly followed with a "I was having quite a jowl movement" comment). Rich then Inducted Frankie Randall. Randall, well known as a singer, has also been an Entertainment Director (Golden Nugget, AC, NJ) and Bally's Grand Hotel Vice-President.

Next up it was Buddy Greco and Lezlie Anders to induct Mamie Van Doren. It was most difficult to recognize that Van Doren still had her trademark blonde hair, as one struggled to get past her low-cut gown, and I say this both figuratively and literally! Clint then took over and sang "You Are so Beautiful" after which, he ad-libbed a few minutes while the camera crews went for fresh tapes. The mention of video reminded me of when I first arrived for the event and needed to pick up my admission tickets at the registration table.

When the envelope was handed to us, Pam and I had quite a discussion as to what the penciled notation on the envelope meant. It simply read, "camera seat" and all the while we awaited entry into the theater we



could hardly contain our anticipation that “camera seat” meant close to the stage. Close to the stage meant a continuous Kodak Moment for my camera. Better yet, “camera seat” could have been a designation that seating was close to the video camera operator(s) (within their view) and from time to time we would appear on the televised portion of the ceremony. Turns out that our second estimate of “camera seat” was in fact a bit more accurate, except that the camera operator was within *our* view, not us within his. Gratefully, the camera operator was not a large person!

After refreshing the videotapes, Clint then introduced Nevada’s Lieutenant Governor, Lorraine Hunt as the next presenter. It seems that Lorraine Hunt’s picture can currently be found on nearly every street corner of Las Vegas. Luckily for her, each picture is also accompanied with her political affiliation and words to the effect of Re-elect Lorraine Hunt for Lieutenant Governor. Nevada is currently experiencing a statewide election. Hunt then inducted Nelson Sardelli, known locally as a longtime singer, actor and even a quick-draw artist. He is reputed to have taught and gotten Sammy Davis Jr. interest-

ed in competitive quick-draw. Upon taking the podium Sardelli remarked that had he known Mamie Van Doren would be dressed as she was, he too would have brought his 44’s! After a hearty chuckle, Sardelli treated everyone to a song.

Well, if anyone was beginning to tire, it was left to the next presenter to wake up the house. It was Charo! Wow, what a spark plug, and of course, plenty of “hoochee goochee!” Charo gave us Norm Crosby as the next inductee, and while Crosby gave us his wonderful butchery of the English language, Charo (who could share the same reputation) was like a wound up spring standing to the side of Crosby while he performed. His slow and measured comedic commentary, as juxtaposed to Charo’s partially self-contained, bubbly effervesce while he spoke, was quite a scene. It was fun to watch her and listen to him.

The last presenter, actually, presenters and inductee, were the Checkmates (Sweet Louie and Sunny Charles) inducting Mr. Lou Rawls. Rawls, The Checkmates and Clint Holmes all sang together and when Rawls accepted his induction, nearly every female in the house swooned,

while every male (except Sweet Louie) asked themselves “Why, why can’t I sound like Lou?” What a voice!

To cap everything off most everyone was brought back on stage. The Inductees, the presenters, the Officials/organizers and of course, the ever present Tropicana Show Girls to take a final bow. Pam, Casey and I, from behind the camera operator, waved to the assembled group and applauded our loudest. We had a really, really good time and hopefully, we will continue to be on the invitee list.

Our Congratulations and thanks are extended to our fellow collector, Steve Cutler, CC>CC Member 1002 and to Associate Member 1002-A, Sheryl Cutler, Steve’s wife.

Note: The Casino Legends Hall of Fame is Open 7-days per week, 9 am to 9 pm. Steve has recently modified several displays in the museum, so if you have not been there in the past month or two, then it will be a new experience. As benefit to CC>CC Members, Steve waives the admission price however, you must show your membership card for entry.

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