

CT  
247  
W75  
2007

## An Interview with Lonnie Wright

An Oral History Conducted by Claytee D. White

---

The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV  
University Libraries  
University of Nevada Las Vegas

©The Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project  
University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2007

Produced by:

The Oral History Research Center at UNLV – University Libraries

Director and Editor: Claytee D. White

Assistant Editors: Barbara Tabach and Gloria Homol

Transcribers: Kristin Hicks and Laurie Boetcher

Interviewers and Project Assistants: Suzanne Becker, Nancy Hardy, Joyce Moore,  
Andres Moses, Laura Plowman, Emily Powers, Dr. Dave Schwartz

The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of Dr. Harold Boyer and the Library Advisory Committee. The Oral History Research Center enables students and staff to work together with community members to generate this selection of first-person narratives. The participants in this project thank the university for the support given that allowed an idea the opportunity to flourish.

The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Boyer Early Las Vegas Oral History Project. Additional transcripts may be found under that series title.

Claytee D. White, Project Director  
Director, Oral History Research Center  
University Libraries  
University Nevada, Las Vegas

## Table of Contents

List of Illustrations	v
Preface	vi
Interview	1 – 57
Index	58 – 59

## Appendix

Stop Drugs, Las Vegas Sun photo clipping, 1987
Regents Review, March 2007
Business Press, July 7, 2008
Minority Business News, 2009
Letter from John C. Lambrose, Law Offices of the Federal Public Defender, Aug. 1998
Letter from Lt. Gary B. Christian, Detroit Police Department, August 1998
Letter from Bellagio, August 1999
Letter from MGM/Mirage, November 2000
Letter from United States Dept. of Education, February 2002
Letter from Randy Black, owner Casa Blanca and Virgin River, September 2002
Letter from Jackie Crawford, Dept. of Corrections, December 2002
Letter from Gov. Kenny Guinn, January 2003
Letter from Kangwon Land, Inc., June 2001
Letter from UNLV, admission to Educational Leadership program, 2009
Shetakis Wholesalers, business plan 2010

## Illustrations

Professor Lonnie Wright	Frontispiece
	Following page
Grandparents at Moulin Rouge opening 1962 grade school photo	3
UNLV Basketball photo with old mascot Basketball Alumni Association events	8
<i>Life</i> magazine, April 23, 1971	17
Las Vegas educator and promoter	43
Las Vegas businessman and entrepreneur	50

## Preface

In the 1940s, over a decade before Lonnie Wright was born, his maternal grandparents and his mother moved from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, to Las Vegas seeking job opportunities. Grandmother Vaughn became a maid to early well-known families such as the Woodburys, the Von Toebels and former Mayor Hess. Grandfather Vaughn worked at the Nevada Test Site. These grandparents would be major influences in his life. A life that includes many accomplishments on the local, national and international fronts.

Though Lonnie's parents were mere teenagers when they met, married, started a family, they instilled an importance of education. Lonnie's father insisted that his sons attend a private, Catholic school across town. He drove them to school each day. However, the divorce of his parents interrupted life in Vegas. Lonnie's mother moved them to Los Angeles, but his grandmother soon then "bribed" him with a car to return to Vegas. He is a 1970 graduate of Western High School.

Lonnie was a two-sport athlete in high school—football and basketball. He accepted a UNLV basketball scholarship and played for Coach Jerry Tarkanian in the early 70s. In 1975, after graduation, he looked at his opportunities and decided to become a dealer at Binion's Horseshoe. He was 22 years old and the only black there. Six months later his journey through the various Strip casinos was underway. Over the next years he would deal at the Rivera, Sahara and Caesars, and others. Each move would boost his income and confidence, but the burden of being black in a mostly white man's arena did not diminish. In this interview, he describes the casino mentality of racism and sexism that he encountered.

With personality and intelligence Lonnie describes dealing with the odds and his road to a series of business accomplishments. He made friends easily, he knew the value of being a team player and using athletics as marketing strategy. By 1984 he had earned his masters degree from UNLV and had earned the respect of many community leaders. His entrepreneurial spirit has lead him to many endeavors from opening a cigar store as young man to his current ownership of Shetakis Wholesalers and Wright Foods.

In started the Basketball Alumni Association to fund athletes who had not finished their degrees. He coached basketball in Singapore and sharpened his international sophistication. At all times he is an educator, whether in the classroom as a professor at CSN or with his business associates. Lonnie has traveled the world in his various roles and gained a vast knowledge of hospitality and tourism marketing.

Lonnie Wright's words paint a picture of a successful educator and businessman, who understood the social issues of the times he was being raised and has lived; and how it was to be a black man in Las Vegas during the 70s through current day.





**This is Claytee White. And I'm with Lonnie Wright. It is October 23rd, 2009. And we're in his office here in Las Vegas.**

**So how are you today?**

I'm doing great. Doing good.

**Wonderful. Well, Lonnie, we're going to start with your early life. And I want you to tell me how you grew up here in Las Vegas and what it was like and your schooling, your early schooling. You may also tell me about your parents, give me their names, what they did for a living.**

Okay. Well, to go all the way back, my grandparents -- my grandmother migrated to Las Vegas from Arkansas from --

**Fordyce.**

Fordyce, no. Pine Bluff. Pine Bluff, Arkansas, like a lot of the African-Americans that migrated to Las Vegas to get a better job, better opportunity, get out of that sun, get out of those fields and get in some air-conditioning and, you know, still do the domestic thing -- the maids, the porters. But my grandmother was lucky enough to ingratiate herself with some of the icons of the city. She became a domestic maid for one of the first mayors of the city, Mayor Hess, his wife. Also she became the maid of the Von Tobels, who are icons in this city. Also, because she did so well with them and they liked her so much, she started working for Claire Woodbury.

His son or grandson, Bruce Woodbury was commissioner for many, many years. People don't know this. Bruce and I know this. I used to get his hand-me-down clothes. She used to bring me -- it was brand new stuff, too. And it made me look like a rich kid, you know. But I used to get Bruce's clothes. But, you know, I'm a lot taller than Bruce now. But sometimes I'll tease with Bruce. I'll say, man, I like that sweater. And only he and I would know what we were talking about. So Bruce has been a lifelong friend.

The Von Tobel girls have been lifelong friends. You know, not very often do the kids of your mother's employer invite you to their birthday parties. So I used to go to these real uppity type of parties for the Von Tobels. So I got to know a lot of very influential people that basically run this town, a lot through my grandmother and then a lot through sports.

**Now, when did your grandmother come here?**

Nineteen -- I want to say '44 or '45. You know, right around in there. I might have said '46, but I think it was before that. It was in the early 40s. It was early 40s.

**And your mom was a child?**

My mother was a child when she came here. My grandfather, who raised me -- I didn't know any other -- was my step-grandfather. He raised me. He's the one that really instilled the manhood. He was one of the first blacks to work at the Test Site. He was a light skin black. If you saw those pictures with the Moulin Rouge, you see he has straight black hair. He had Indian in him. And he was very, very quiet. The only time -- and when he spoke it was like E.F. Hutton. You'd listen. He was not an educated man, but he was a God-fearing man and a very hard worker. When I was a young kid, he would come home just from head to toe nothing but dirt and grime on him. He made good money for those days. He was in the mine. He got my uncle, my grandmother's brother, Uncle Hollis, working up in the mines.

**Did either of them die of cancer?**

Yes. No. Well, my uncle is still alive. But my grandfather died of cancer. And a lot of the people that he worked with died of cancer. But, you know, we never did go after. Some people did. But my uncle, he's too ornery to die I guess. You know, Uncle Hollis, he's one of those tough brothers. But he's still alive.

When I was a young kid my father, who I think was way ahead of his time when it comes to sophistication and being worldly, he was 18 -- my mother and father had my older brother, who's 11 months older than me, Larry Wright, when she was 14 and my father was 18. And he was in special service in the Air Force at Nellis. He was a boxer. That's what he did.

**What is his name?**

Ernest Wright, Jr. They had me when she was 15 and he was 19. However, my father was the one that sent my brother and me to parochial school. He noticed being around a lot of those individuals that were high-ranking people because he was into sports in the military. So he had access to generals and people like that, a young man. And they loved him because he was a good fighter. And he fought for the Air Force. He basically saw that this school district was sending some of the worst teachers to the black area. It was segregated. Now, not the black teachers. Mr. Kirkland, Mr. Fitzgerald -- I can name some of them. And I didn't go to any of the black

schools. But I knew them. They were part of our community. The black teachers were passionate. They were good. But there weren't enough of them. And so they sent a lot of apathetic, or what my father said, the white teachers that they wanted to punish or that weren't in good graces. He said that the school district, and still today, has a real -- the LDS community kind of like controlled it, according to my father. And back in those days even the religion said that we were cursed people. You know, that's what the LDS used to say. They don't say it any longer.

**Yeah. They allow blacks in their church now.**

Yes. Matter of fact, my neighbors are LDS, beautiful people. But anyway, he sent us to private school because when the blacks did intermingle or were bussed to junior high school, they couldn't read, they couldn't write, they couldn't do any of the three Rs. And so it perpetuated that myth that we were dumb and stupid because the white kids would say, you know, these people can't write. My parents were right; they are dumb; they're less than us. However, my brother and I, we had enough parochial school, so we started going to junior high school. We could out read the white kids, and so we were just somewhat of an anomaly. But most of -- not all, but most of our contemporaries could not read. Hence, they started dropping out of school, getting in trouble, dying early. I had childhood friends die, shot by police. This was a very, very racist town to the point that the police were to keep us in line, black folk in line and in our place. And they did a very good job.

**So which year were you born?**

1952. Larry was born in '51. My brother was a world-class athlete at a very young age. He and I were on scholarship together. I was on basketball scholarship at UNLV. He was on football scholarship. But he transferred from the University of Arizona and got on scholarship here. But as a young kid we were disciplined by the parochial system, the nuns and the fathers. Back in those days they could corporal punish you.

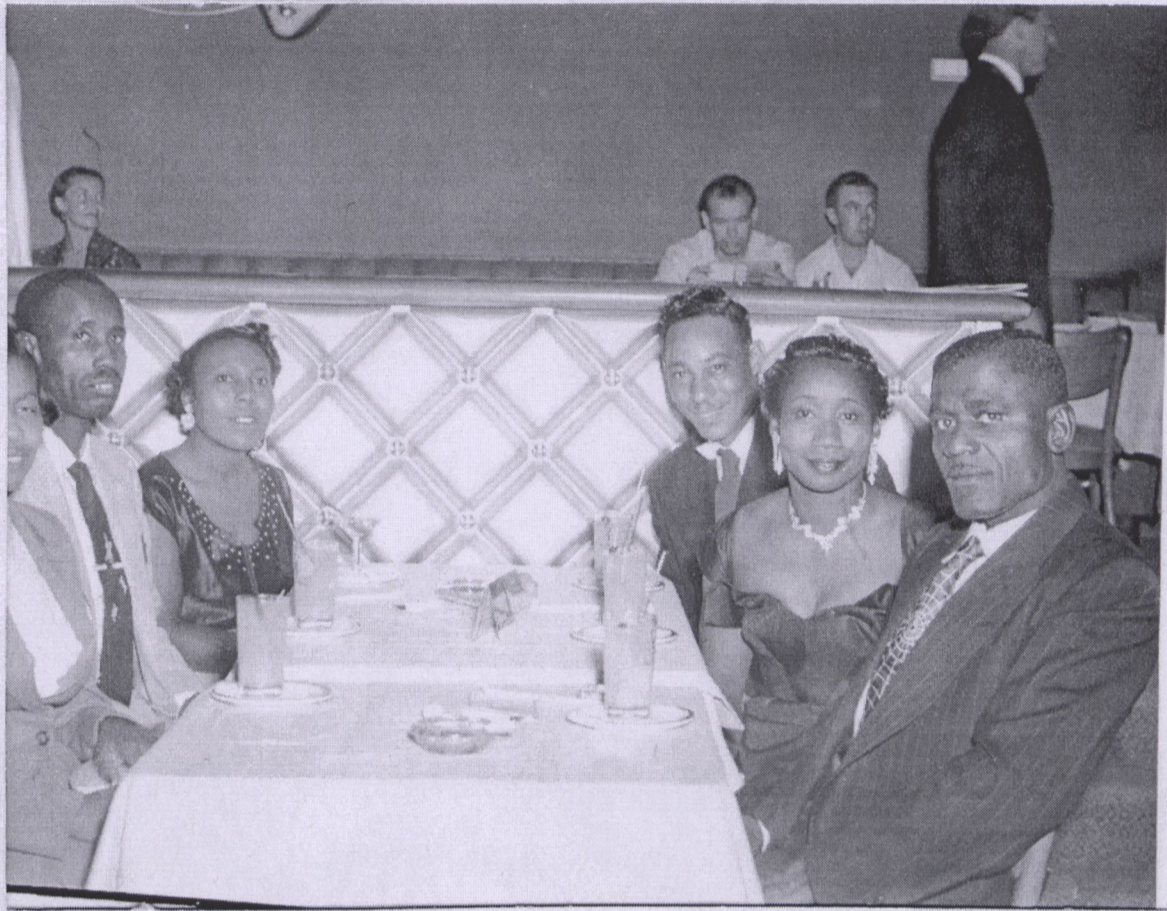
**So which school?**

I went to Our Lady of Las Vegas the first year it opened up. And to show you how passionate my father was about us getting an education, he would drive us all the way out to Henderson to Saint Peter's every day, my father. That's how he wanted his kids to grow up, with a proper education. He would drive us every day. And then there were a few other blacks. And they would trade off

**Captions for Following Pages**

**Photo 1:** Opening night at the Moulin Rouge. Pictured left to right: unidentified woman; Lonnie's Uncle Fred Brown and his wife Sister Brown; his grandparents, Elmo and Everlean Terry and good friend Johnny.

**Photo 2:** Lonnie's fourth grade class at Our Lady of Las Vegas School in 1962. Lonnie is in the fifth row.





OUR LADY OF LAS VEGAS  
SCHOOL  
Las Vegas, Nevada  
January, 1962

Sister Catherine Padraic  
Fourth Grade



driving.

**So Saint James never had a school?**

Saint James was the black Catholic church on the Westside. We went there.

**Did they have a school?**

No. Never had a school.

**So that's why you had to go so far.**

Right. Never had a school. But all of the blacks that went to parochial school -- there was a handful of us -- we would all go to church. When they make the cliché that Sunday is the most segregated day in America, it's true because all of us -- some of the blacks went to Saint Joseph's, some to, I think, Saint Christopher's. It was just maybe about less than 15 of us. And Larry and I and a couple other blacks went to Saint Peter's. We would all go to church on the Westside at Saint James.

**Now, did your parents -- those 15 kids who went to parochial school, did parents go to Catholic church as well?**

Huh-uh.

**So how was that on Sunday morning?**

They just sent us there because they felt -- in retrospect, you know, back in the day when blacks tried to assimilate with whites by the way we talked. I say it's remnants of Jim Crow-ism and remnants of Willie Lynch where the only thing that meant anything of substance came from the white man. And so a lot of the times the only thing that was validated came from white mouths. I said that to -- I kind of got off.

**Well, before you get back talking about the Catholic church and the parents going to church and all of that on Sunday morning, go ahead and tell me who Willie Lynch is for the recording.**

Oh, Willie Lynch from my study was a slave owner that was successful in breaking down and controlling slaves. And he was very brutal. He had a convention. He was asked to come to a convention to America because of his tactics of controlling hundreds of slaves to maximize his profits through brutal, brutal methods of dehumanizing individuals where the only thing that they trusted was what came out of the master's mouth. If a black was to say something, then they'd say,

oh, well, that Negro don't know what he's talking about. And that was a mind-set. That was a mind-set that carries even to today. There are African-Americans that are still indoctrinated and programmed. And Willie Lynch said that his tactics would last four hundred years. And one thing about Willie Lynch, he got that one right because it was so brutal.

**So that's what I wanted you to explain. Now, if you'll go back and talk about -- you were getting ready to tell me about Sunday mornings, going to the Catholic church and how parents dealt with that.**

Well, parents did not -- they belonged to their own churches. But they sent us to Catholic church because back in those days -- that's what I was alluding to -- it was kind of like a status symbol to be a Catholic, a black to be a Catholic, although we weren't really embraced by the Catholic -- when I think back we really weren't embraced. But they accepted us. But our parents went to Baptist churches and stuff like that. But they sent their kids -- we had to become Catholic to go into their system. That's why we became Catholic. And to this day -- you know, I was one of those kids that wanted to be the best that I could be. So I still remember my Latin. (Speaking Latin.) You know, all that I had to learn as an altar boy because the mass was spoken in Latin.

But going back on Sunday mornings, we would go to Catholic church and our grandparents and our parents would go to the Baptist churches. But like I said it was mandatory that we go to Catholic church to be a part. And I can remember to this day the indoctrination that they put on young impressionable minds, white or black, that once you're a Catholic you're always a Catholic.

**Do you feel that now?**

No, absolutely not when I started realizing that it's all about a personal relationship with the Creator and that some organized religions are the very opposite of what the Bible says. They put their own spin on it. And the way I look at it, the Bible says God's word does not return void. So you can get a David Koresh and a Jim Jones and a lot of false prophets to utilize God's word. And because in the Bible it says that men are sheep, we are equated to sheep, if you talk to any farmer, they'll tell you sheep are very dumb. And so we never learn from each other. You can get a herd of sheep to graze on the side of the cliff. And one will fall. They all will fall unless the shepherd shoos them away from that cliff. So I just think that -- no, I don't believe a lot of the tenets in



certain organized religion because it's the very opposite of what the Bible says.

**Okay. Now, at one point you went to school at Garside.**

Yes.

**Now, where is that? And tell me about that.**

Garside, back in the day, was like one of the furthest points going west of Las Vegas. You had Garside and you had the desert because I remember as a kid one of the things that our PE coach would do is tell us, okay, go run around the pole. Well, the pole was way out in the desert. We had to run around the pole and he would watch us with binoculars.

**So what kind of pole was it out there?**

It was like a telephone pole out in the desert. They were expanding. Right now I mean it's miles and miles of houses past that [point]. But this was back when Garside was like at the edge of Las Vegas.

**And is Garside near Decatur or where is Garside?**

Garside, it's below Decatur. Matter of fact, those poles were probably on Decatur that we would run around and run back there. Garside was at the very end. That's when we started getting bused. That's when my brother and I said that's enough of the parochial school. Our parents gave us a choice. Do you want to go to parochial school or do you want to -- we wanted to go with our friends that we grew up on the Westside with. We had a pretty unique upbringing because we went to school -- Our Lady of Las Vegas was in the lap of luxury. You had to go through a place called Rancho Circle, some of the most expensive homes in town and the most affluent people. So sometimes Larry and I would ride from the Westside our bikes, through these neighborhoods and go to our school. And so we at a young age, in retrospect now, we got a chance of seeing the white world and the black world. And so that kind of rendered us not as programmed as the kids that we grew up with because when you talked about white people on the Westside or the kids that I grew up with they just couldn't believe that Larry and I were the only blacks in our class and that sort of thing.

**Where on the Westside did the family live?**

We lived on A Street. A Street is right across the street from the railroad tracks.

**And today it's probably under the freeway.**

Yeah. All of that land has been taken over. But we lived across the street from the old Review-Journal newspaper. That's no longer there. The railroad tracks are still there. Matter of fact, I think there is a recycling place that took over our area. But that was all black. Then across the tracks down to the north side was the Native American reservation. It's still there. It's still there. And so that was our diversity. Down the street we had Johnny Lopez who was our childhood friend -- we grew up with him. He's with the school district now, Johnny Lopez. What we liked about Johnny, he had three beautiful sisters. Johnny Lopez, he was a good athlete. He later on became a maître d' out on the Strip, made a lot of money. When he was at the DI and different places, he would always call us if the Temptations or the Four Tops [were in town]. He'd say come on down and see the show.

**Wow. Great. So now, is he still around?**

He's still around.

**Really? And is your Uncle Hollis still around?**

Still alive.

**I would love to interview those two people.**

Okay. Johnny Lopez you can call at the school district. He works in the food area of the school district. My Uncle Hollis, I can give you his phone number. Aunt Delores is going to answer. You better explain who you are because you're a female.

**I will. I'll do it fast.**

Yeah, do it real fast. Just say -- use my name because to this day -- back in the day he was a womanizer.

**I understand.**

So she don't play. See, I even put it under Aunt Delores. I didn't even put it under Uncle Hollis. Her number is 243-8029. Aunt Delores and Uncle Hollis.

**Okay, good. I have that. And I'm going to call her Aunt Delores when I call.**

**So tell me about leaving high school and then going to UNLV for both you and your brother, how that worked out.**

When my parents got a divorce, we moved to Los Angeles with my mother. And I spent six years in L.A. Well, I started off at parochial school at Saint Bridget's. And then I went to Angeles Mesa

Elementary School. Then from there I went to one year of Audubon Junior High School. A lot, a lot of influential black entertainers' kids went there. And my brother went there. Then my brother and I, because my grandmother and my grandfather spoiled us, we said can we go stay with them? And my mother allowed us to stay. And so we went to Garside. Larry and I went to Garside. We went to Garside for one year. And because we had been exposed to Los Angeles and black professionals and black progression, this was like going back into Jim Crow town. So when we went over there for one year, we said, no, we're going back to L.A.

So we went back to L.A. I went through the eighth and the ninth. Then I went to Dorsey High School for one semester. And when Crenshaw High School opened up, I went there. My brother graduated from Dorsey. He did not go to Crenshaw because he was a star athlete. He stayed at Dorsey. I went to Crenshaw. And then my grandmother bribed me with a new car. So I went back to Las Vegas and went to Western. So I went to Western High School the 11th and 12th grade, graduated. I had more football scholarships than basketball, but I decided to play basketball at UNLV.

**Okay, good.**

My brother had a lot of football scholarships and he went to Arizona State.

**Now, why did your mother decide on L.A. after the divorce?**

You have to ask her. I think it was opportunity because she always was a hard worker, always had a job, always looked to progress. You'd have to ask her why.

**Okay, good. So tell me about UNLV. And which year was this?**

I graduated in 1970. I started at UNLV in the fall of '70, '71. You know, at the half it turns to '71. When I went to UNLV, it was very -- the athletic community was pretty nice. The academic community was overtly racist. And they really didn't like a black athlete, most of the teachers that I had.

**And how did you see that? How did that play out?**

Oh, they would let you know. The ones that I interfaced with, they would say you're not going to get any special deals here because you're an athlete. And I never solicited any special deal. But they made it a point to tell me that. I've had that done two or three times. And at UNLV there was a segment of academia that did not like black athletes, did not like the athletic department because

### Captions for Following Pages

From UNLV basketball player standout to organizing the Basketball Alumni Association to raise funds to help players complete their college educations, the basketball court was an integral part of Lonnie Wright's many successes.

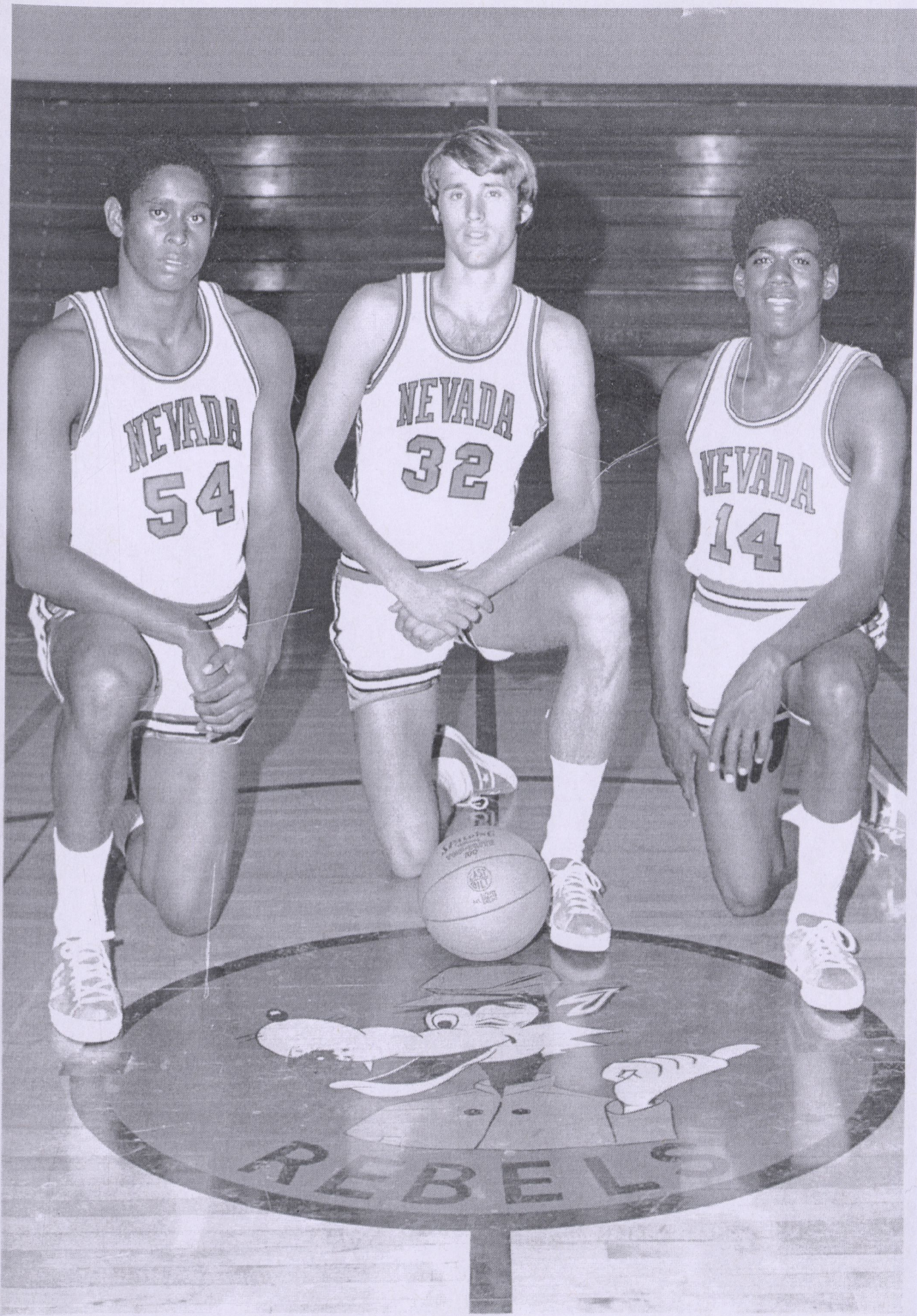
**Photo 1:** UNLV Basketball photo features the original confederate-inspired mascot logo. Pictured (left to right): Lonnie Wright, Mike Whaley and Harry Shaw.

**Photo 2:** At a Basketball Alumni Association event to roast Coach Tarkanian. Pictured (left to right): Sidney Green, Coach Jerry Tarkanian, Steve Wynn and Lonnie Wright.

**Photo 3:** UNLV Basketball Alumni Association and Lonnie Wright being honored for success. Top photo features, (left to right): Lois Tarkanian, Sherri and Lonnie Wright and UNLV President Carol Harter.

**Photo 4:** UNLV alumni versus University of North Carolina alumni; pictured (left to right): Reggie Theus, Michael Jordan, Sam Perkins and Jackie Robinson.

**Photo 5:** UNLV alumni also played Michigan State alumni that included Earvin "Magic" Johnson.













the athletic department had too many blacks in it. That's what I thought. And that lasted a long time to the point that when I started teaching at UNLV in hotel management and I would have Elaine Wynn and all these high-profile people to come out and speak in my class, they would never give me a full-time job at UNLV, ever. And I was doing things that other instructors could not do because I had a personal relationship with some of the icons of Las Vegas from playing sports.

**So now, after finishing UNLV is when you went to work at UNLV?**

Okay. When I got my undergraduate degree in hotel management, I went to work at the Sahara Hotel.

**So that's your first professional job?**

As an assistant hotel manager. That was my first professional job. And when I saw the dealers making more money than me, I went to dealer school.

**So where did you go to dealing school?**

I can't remember the name of that.

**Was it here locally?**

Yeah, here in Las Vegas.

**Did it have anything to do with EOB?**

No.

**So yours was a private school.**

Yeah. I went to private school -- oh, Denny Walker. Denny Walker, he was a guy that owned his own dealing school. Now I remember his name. And he was a baccarat dealer at Caesars at that time, making a lot of money. And then I broke in dealing at the Horseshoe because my cousin Benny Rose was named after Benny Binion. He was named after Benny Binion because my uncle "Gold Dollar," every tooth in his mouth was gold, was a notorious gangster. And they ran underground, illegal gaming in Texas.

**So he came here with Binion.**

He came here with Binion.

**Is "Gold Dollar" still alive?**

No. He passed away. But his wife, Lubertha Rose, and Benny, they go to my church. She's still

alive. She can tell you all kinds of -- and she's got her mind. She's older than my grandmother.

**Will she talk about those days?**

I don't know. You would have to ask her.

**Okay, good.**

Let me see here. If you bring up the "Gold Dollar," they'll talk. Let me give you Benny's number. Benny Rose is 897-7192. I know that by heart. I don't know why I looked it up. Every morning my brother, my younger brother, Benny, myself, and a guy named Winston, we have prayer every morning at 5:30. So they are very, very -- sometimes if I work late in the night, I have to take my phone off the hook and get my rest. But I would say we pray almost -- I average about five nights a week.

**Wonderful.**

Yeah. "Gold Dollar" is somebody that a lot of people know. I'll let them tell you about him. But I'll tell you one thing. He was a notorious gangster, notorious gangster. But he treated us nice. The only thing is we never got out of line with him. And sometimes -- the television is right here. And my cousin Benny's room was right here. We had to wait until a commercial came on before we walked by. That was just one of his things. Boy, don't walk in front of the TV.

**I understand that.**

But anyway, he was a tough guy. He was almost my height, but a big heavy guy.

**And you are six what?**

I'm six-six. "Gold Dollar" was -- I'll let them tell you about "Gold Dollar."

**Okay, good. Good. I can't wait for that.**

**So you're at the Horseshoe.**

I was at the Horseshoe because I was one of "Gold Dollar's" descendants. They didn't hire any blacks in gaming hardly.

**So which year approximately are we talking about now?**

Probably 1975.

**So you graduated from UNLV in 1974?**

Correct.

**Okay, good.**

Hotel management.

**So tell me about the experience of working in the Horseshoe. And 1975 is the time when we had just passed that consent decree that blacks have to have 12 percent of jobs. So did that play into --**

No. No. My thing was all about this concept called juice. Because I was related to "Gold Dollar," I could get the job. Like I said, my cousin Benny was named after Benny Binion.

**Now, is Benny "Gold Dollar's" son?**

Yeah.

**Okay, good.**

And so when I went for my audition, Lonnie Binion, who is called Ted Binion -- he's the one that got killed.

**Yeah. I remember.**

We were all good friends. He watched my audition.

**When you're dealing that's called an audition?**

Audition before you get the job. If you can't get around the layout and you didn't know how to count the money or deal, you don't get the job. So a lot of people get nervous on audition. I was one. What happened was the first live action I had where people were betting, Teddy Binion, who was named Lonnie Binion --

**Same as your brother.**

Same as me, Lonnie. But they called him Ted Binion after his mother. His mother's name was Teddy. I knew all of these characters. So I went in and I said -- Benny had asked for me to get an audition. So I went down. He said go talk to Ted. So I went to Ted. He said, hey, man, what's going on? Because I played ball. He said, okay, you go tap that dealer out. So when I tapped the dealer out, the dealer was shuffling. And usually -- and it was a hand deck. The dealer was shuffling. He was shuffling. Only one person was at the table. And that person was like slumped down with his cowboy hat on. So he didn't see that it was a black guy that took over. And so this is my first interaction with live action, now. So I started shuffling the cards. And he had a spit cup right here. He was doing that Skoal.

**Chewing tobacco.**

Yeah. A lot of cowboys used to go to the Binion. Nice guy, now. He was a nice guy now that I think back. He was a younger guy. He was older than I was. He was probably in his early 40s or below. Anyway, it was Helldorado time. So there were a lot of cowboys in there. And why did I pick at that time to go do an audition? But anyway, so when I was shuffling the cards, he had a spit cup and he was drinking I think straight Jack Daniels or something. So if you could imagine his hat was down. So you can't see that far in front of you. Then I saw his head start coming up. Then I could tell that he saw my hands were black. It wasn't no white dealer. So it didn't shock him. He just kept coming up, coming up, coming up because I'm tall. Then when he finally got up to me, he had some of that stuff on his mouth and he smiled and you could see the stuff in his mouth. And the first words out of a live action to me in dealing was, "GD, you're a big son of a" -- he said that to me. And that shocked me because, you know, here I was an athlete. Nobody ever talked to me like that before. That kind of like made me nervous. And in my mind I said, Is this what dealing's going to be about? But he was nice.

And so now I'm dealing. Then I saw all these chips on the table because the other guys took a break because the dealer was shuffling up. So now they start coming back. And all of them were cowboys. They were all just having fun with me, you know. But it made me nervous because I was a new dealer. And so I got so nervous that I dealt the cards counterclockwise. You know that's like death on trying to get a job. You know what I'm saying?

**No.**

See, you deal this way.

**Clockwise, uh-huh.**

I got so nervous I went that way. But I didn't stay in dealing school that long because I had juice and I knew I'd get me a job because somebody knew me and that sort of thing. So Teddy Binion came next to me. This is me dealing out. So he's in the pit. He comes next to me. His back is turned to the players. And he kicks me on my shoe and he says, "Hey, Lonnie, next time go the other way."

Now, when he said that my heart fell to the floor. I said, oh, Lord, I can't wait to get off this audition; I'm going to go practice. I know I've blown the job. The job is gone. So after I got off -- Teddy was the type of guy that never really looked you in the eye. He was always looking --

you know, he just wasn't that type. He was always moving. And he says, now, you know you need some practice. I said, yeah, Teddy, I know. He says I'm going to get a guy to help you to get your game better. And he called over Bucky Howard, Sr. He's an icon. And his son, Bucky Howard, Jr., was also a big icon in the game. So Bucky Howard, Sr., taught me how to deal. And guess what? They gave me the job. He says, okay, you still going to school? I said no, I graduated. He says what shift do you want to work? I'm saying, oh, my goodness, I just blew this audition. He asked me what shift. And I was so humbled by what I had done, I said any shift you want me to work. You know, I'll be happy to have any shift. And he says, well, we're going to start you on swing shift. So I was the only black.

**So tell me about swing shift. What hours are those?**

Swing shift is usually from four to 12.

**4:00 p.m. to 12 midnight.**

Yeah, 12 midnight.

**So tell me what it was like for a young man. You're only, what, 21, 22?**

I'm about 22.

**So what is it like for a young man to be working in a casino and you're the only black person probably other than the service staff, the maids?**

Right. And all of them looked at me like I had three heads. They just wondered. But the word got around to the whites and the blacks that I was "Gold Dollar's" nephew. So everybody treated me good. The Binions ran their hotel and casino like a family. And you had to be loyal. You know, you just had to treat them with respect. They were like royalty. And to get a Binion to speak to you was like the Queen of England speaking to you. Yeah. So they used to always talk to me all the time. And my uncle would come up and stop at my table. He was security at that time.

**Did the Binions at that point live over on Bonanza at Tonopah, that house?**

Yep.

**Did you ever go to that house?**

No, I never did. My cousin used to go there a lot. I never did. I could have gone -- they also had a big ranch in Montana that was almost as wide -- they told me it was almost as wide as Nevada.

And a lot of guys would go over there and work on the ranch. And I was offered [ a chance] to go there. I said no, I'm not going up there. But anyway, no, my cousin Benny used to go up to their house.

**So if you --**

He talks to one of the Binion sisters now. I think it's Becky. He talks to her quite often. They all grew up like I grew up with the Von Tobels.

**So now, in 1975 you were the first black dealer that you know of probably in downtown.**

I was the only black dealer probably -- I was the only black dealer at the Horseshoe. I wasn't the first. I think Judge Mullen's son was one of the first black dealers. I was in the top one percent.

**Right. Sarann Knight Preddy also had a son who was one of the early dealers.**

Yeah. I know all her sons.

**So what about on the Strip? Did we have any early black dealers that you knew?**

We had black dealers on the Strip. And a lot of them got there through a program, almost similar to the program that I did.

**So are you talking about through EOB?**

I think so. I think that's how they got there. But I stayed at the Horseshoe long enough to learn roulette. And I knew I wanted to go to the Strip because that's where the money was being made.

**More than the Horseshoe?**

Oh, absolutely. Like five times as much.

**Oh. So where did you go when you left the Horseshoe?**

Riviera Hotel.

**How did they feel about you leaving?**

Oh, they didn't care. They didn't care. They wanted the best for me. They didn't care. But sometimes you could get stuck downtown two, three, four, five, ten years before you get a shot at the Strip. I got a shot in six months. And I made a phone call to Jerry Tarkanian. Jerry Tarkanian called one of the owners of the Riviera. And they gave me the job.

**For the record tell me who Jerry Tarkanian is.**

My former basketball coach.

**I'm sure that most people will know, but thank you. So that's how you got over to the**

**Riviera.**

At the Riviera. And I was making so much money.

**So give me an idea of how much money you were making because then you were only about 23.**

Yeah, I was about 23. We were averaging about \$150 a day in tips plus our salary. So that's a lot of money for a young kid.

**Yes, it is. It's a lot of money today when you think about 100-something dollars per day.**

Yeah. But some days we may walk out of there with three, \$400.

**Yes. And we're talking about that's not taxed. At the time it was not taxed.**

No. I was living like a king.

**Yes. You had to be.**

I was living like a king. Bought me a brand-new Eldorado Cadillac.

**That's great.**

I lived over at one of the top apartment complexes, the Villas. It's a dump now. But that's where all the hustlers, all the high profile people with money were. So that was my introduction to real Sin City because of all the money we were making.

**Yes. I'm not going to ask you to explain that. But you also at this time -- earlier when you were at UNLV, you participated in some community activities with the Ruby Duncan movement.**

Absolutely.

**Tell me about that. There was a march on the Strip.**

I have always, because of my childhood, been -- I don't know if this is something that God put in me. But I've always been very cognizant of the double standards from going to private school and seeing what I saw at a young age and then compare and contrast to where I lived. And I knew something was wrong there because I was so embraced by my childhood friends, my white friends that there was no -- matter of fact, they wouldn't have a party without me and my brother. So I don't know. I had a real keen sense of awareness of the unfair disparity treatment and inside of me wanted to do something about it.

**So before you go ahead and talk about the march on the Strip, how did you reconcile the fact**



**that you were always part of that white community and, yet, you could see that blacks weren't treated like they should have been treated and probably by some of your white friends' parents? So how did you put that together?**

It was sort of complex because I was accepted except for policemen. Policemen would stop anybody that looked black and harass you and do the Jim Crow-Willie Lynch thing. That was a big thing in Las Vegas was the police would always reinforce your inferiority. They would always do that especially if you were driving outside of the Westside.

**And probably especially in an Eldorado.**

Oh, yeah. Yeah. But at that time I was kind of well known because of sports and stuff like that. But then there was always a segment of whites that say I don't care who you are. Just like the guy that called Barack [Obama] a liar, they don't care if you're the President. It's in them to feel that they have an inalienable right to let you know that you're less than them.

**So go ahead now and tell me about getting involved with Ruby Duncan and that movement.**

Well, that kind of started when I was in Los Angeles. I was in L.A. during the time of the Watts Riot. There was a renaissance of black pride that went throughout Los Angeles. And I got caught up in it because my mother got caught up in it and our neighbors got caught up in it. And so, you know, I think that was the start of it. Then when I moved back to Vegas, the Black Panther party just happened to be right across the street from my grandmother's house. Being a young impressionable kid, you know, I knew some of the Panthers. And before I know it I was kind of going across the street and being a part of the breakfast program and a lot of good stuff, a lot of good stuff. People suppress the good because it was a threat to them.

**Of course.**

And so they don't talk about the good part about it. But anyway, I became very socially conscious then. So now, when I started going to school at UNLV, one of the socially conscious things that I dealt with, along with some other black athletes that were coming in out of California, was that -- remember I sent you that picture of the mascot of us.

**Oh, yes.**

Okay. We protested that. We're not going to run out on the field after a mascot waving a Confederate flag.

**Right.**

We're not going to make a mockery out of ourselves. And so they stopped that.

**Okay, good.**

But to get even with us -- I don't know if I shared that -- we won that. We as black athletes won that. They took the Confederate flags. They changed the uniform of the mascot not because they wanted to hold hands and sing "Kumbaya" but because it wasn't -- it hurt them economically. They wanted us to fill up those seats with winners, see, because one thing about Las Vegas you've got to win here because the whole thing of gambling is all about winning. If you have a losing team, you could shoot a shotgun out there and you won't hit one fan.

**Yeah. I think our football team is going through that right now.**

They're going through it right now. It's just a part of the Las Vegas culture. We only support winners in Vegas.

But that was my first brush with my social consciousness in putting everything on the line including my scholarship. And so I had heard -- there were some people coming out on campus talking about this and it caught my ear. And I said no, that's not right. And they started recruiting -- you know, a lot of your social movements are always started with college students. They were smart enough to come out there and start sowing seeds of this. And being a sponge like young college students are, white and black, we went to that march. And because of my size, they put me around Dr. Reverend Abernathy. At a certain point of the march, a limousine drives up and Jane Fonda gets out and gets right in front of us. That's how that picture got taken. I'm right behind Jane Fonda.

**So it's that picture that's on the cover of the book.**

Did I send you that?

**No. I have the book.**

No. She's on the cover of the book by herself. Inside that article you see the picture of me. And Jane Fonda is in front of me. And Ruby Duncan and all those people are in that picture.

**Right. Yes.**

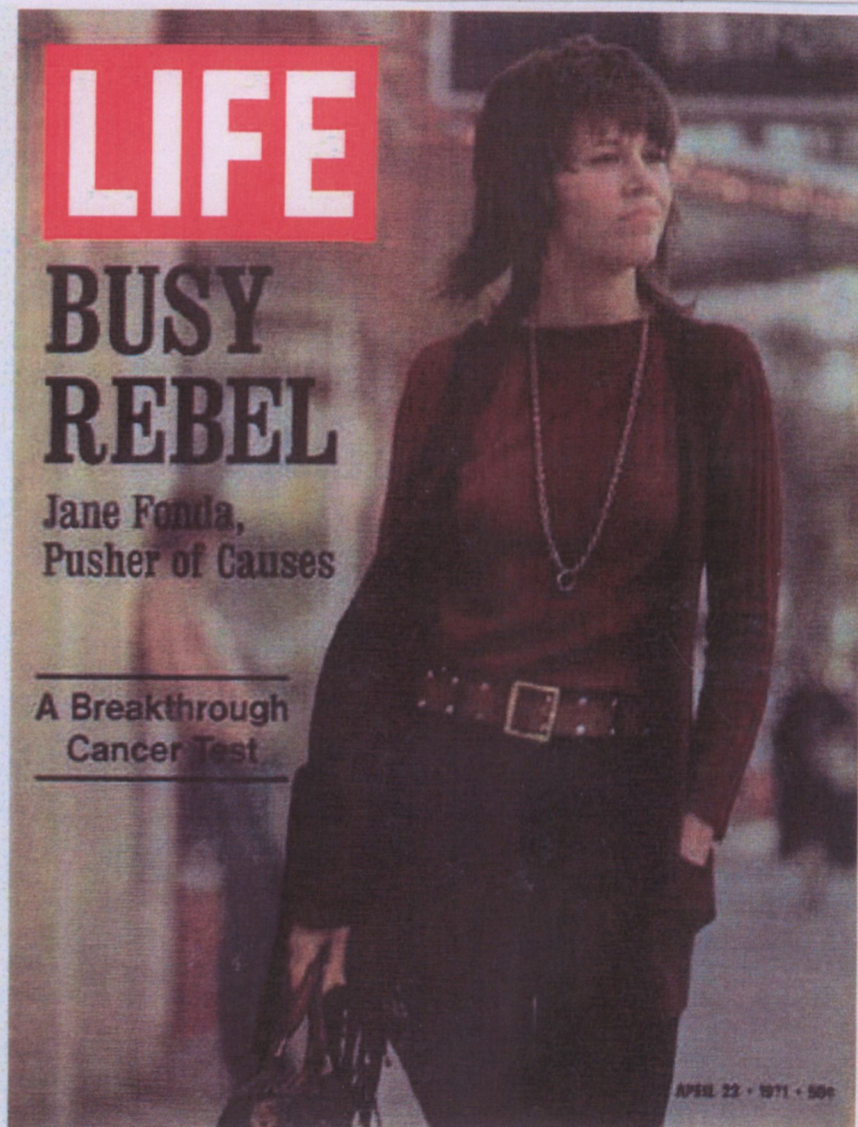
And so now the FBI started looking at all of those people in that picture. And they found out about all of us. Well, obviously it's apparent that they found out that I was just an athlete. They

### Captions for Following Pages

**Photo 1:** In 1971, activist/actress Jane Fonda brought her cause to the campus of UNLV. *Life* magazine featured her infamous visit to Las Vegas and played off the Rebel mascot in the cover story title.

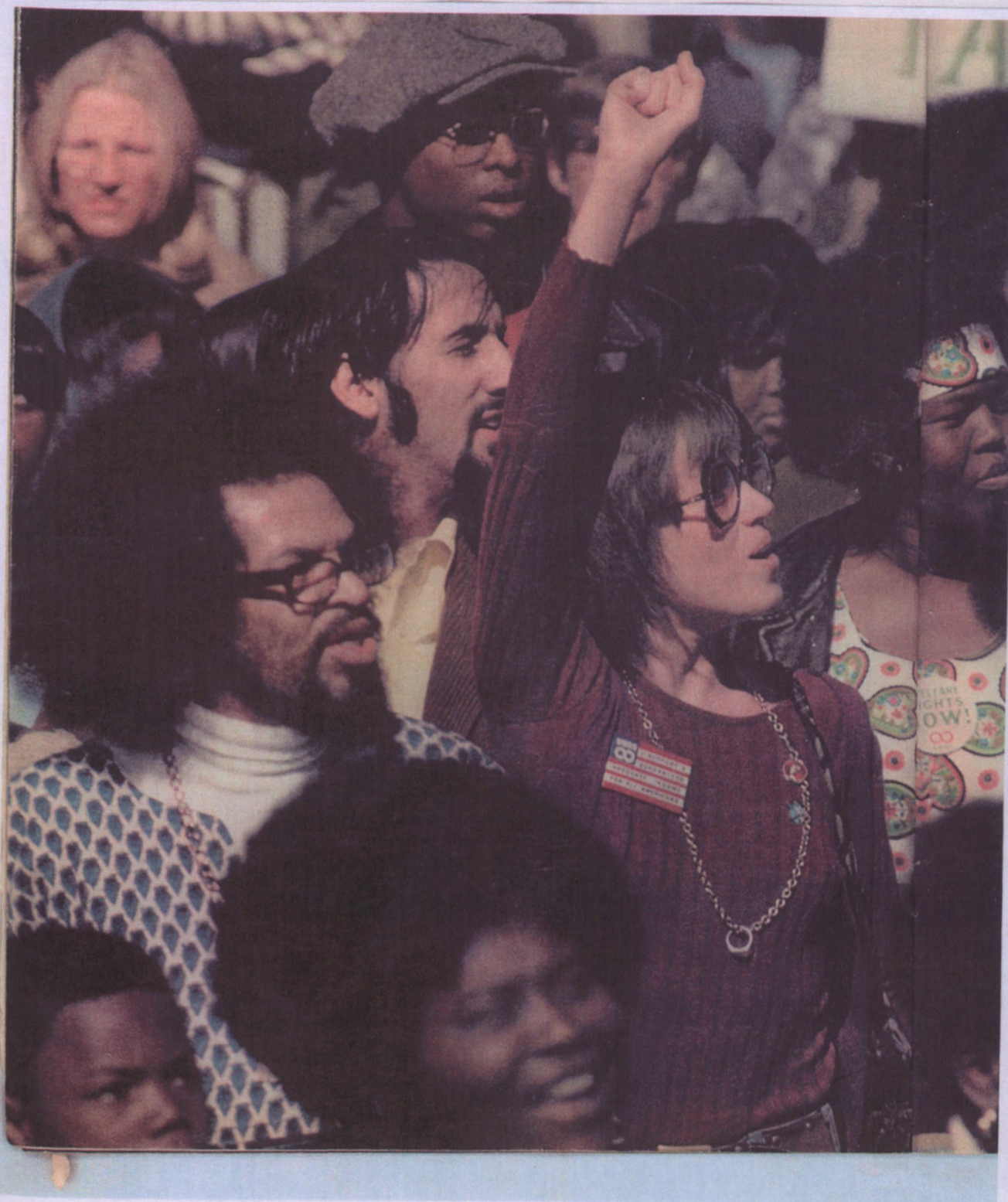
**Photo 2:** Lonnie is shown inside the magazine attending a rally. He is in cap behind Fonda.

**LIFE** Magazine  
April 23, 1971



**LIFE** Magazine

**Lonnie Wright at rally in Las Vegas**



went to my coach, John Bayer. That's before Tark got there. And John Bayer had a talk with me and said, you know, you've got to stop this activity or you may affect your scholarship.

**Wow.**

But that didn't deter me. It just made me more determined. It just made me more -- some people you can knock the fight out of them. Some you knock the fight in them. I'm something like my father and my mother. My mother's a fighter too.

**Wow. That's great. So tell me, at this point you probably got married about this time?**

When I graduated from college I got married. I got married --

**So when you had the Eldorado, you were married then?**

Let me see. Let me think. Let me think now. No. I got divorced -- see, I was 22 when I got married. My last time playing basketball at UNLV, my wife was introduced to me by my brother. She was a model, tall—six foot-one-inch, black, beautiful sister. On my last game -- I can remember it like it was yesterday -- I was sitting on the bench and my brother was pointing at this beautiful girl. He said she wants to meet you, right? And from that moment we were together until we got a divorce. We were married for about two and a half years. We were too young, too young. And I got married for all the wrong reasons. You know, she said her parents were coming to town. And I was at that time spending the night at her house. I said, ah, I'm not going to move my stuff; let's just go get married. Shows you how dumb -- how bulletproof kids think they are, right? So we went and got married. So when her parents got there, we were married. Being so young you don't know what marriage was all about. It wasn't just a convenience so you didn't have to move your clothes.

**I love it.**

So we stayed married for two and a half years. Then after that, because she was my wife when I went to work at --

**Sahara?**

No. Yeah, at the Sahara Hotel she was my wife. And she was my wife when I went to dealing school and my wife when I was at Binion's. And then we got a divorce when I was at the Riviera.

**So now, during the 70s do you remember also that there were young black women going into midlevel management jobs like Jackie Brantley, Faye Todd, Faye Daniels? Do you**

**remember them being on the Strip at that time? They were at the Desert Inn and some of the other places.**

I really don't. I don't remember them. Back in those days I wasn't looking for wholesome smart girls. I'm just being honest.

**Say no more.**

Just being honest.

**Okay, good. How long were you at the Riviera?**

Four and a half years.

**Oh, wow. Okay.**

And then I went to Caesars. And going to Caesars in those days was like going to heaven.

**So Caesars didn't open until 1966, right?**

I don't know when Caesars opened.

**Oh, okay. It opened in '66. So it was already in the 70s. It's almost 1980, isn't it?**

Yeah. I went to Caesars. That's like the number one job in town.

**Tell me why.**

I started the Basketball Alumni Association to send basketball athletes back to school to finish their degrees. In 1977 I started the Basketball Alumni Association because as I told you I was socially conscious. I saw that black athletes were being exploited. A lot of them did not get their degree. And the one guy that I looked up to -- remember I told you I had a lot of scholarships in football. This one guy named Tommy Watkins was a flashy ball player. And he helped recruit me in basketball at UNLV. And I actually went to school because Tommy Watkins spoke to me. And I had a trip to Cornell University in football. I had a scholarship to Washington State, Oregon State, much better schools than UNLV at that time. I went there because I was so enamored with Tommy Watkins because he was such a great ball player.

What made me start the Basketball Alumni? I had graduated and I was doing well because I was dealing and making a lot of money. I went to a Rebel game and I was at the concession stand and I heard this bumping on the door. You have to understand how the old convention center was made. It kind of was in a circle. I looked and there was a black guy hitting on the door with authority. I looked and it was Tommy. The [nearer] I approached him the more he looked

homeless. it -- you know, I opened the door for him. I let him in free because everybody was in the game. And so he just looked all tattered. The last time I saw him he was well-dressed. There were articles in the paper about him going pro and he had a few cars and this and that. And he was all tattered. And his teeth -- he just looked bad. And then he started telling me how the university used him and this, that and the other. It was a tough thing. And it just got me. He said something needs to be done about this.

**So did he finish his degree?**

No. No. I never knew what happened. All I knew is that after I met with him, I said, man -- remember, he was my hero. And so I said I've got to do something about this; this is not right. And it was like a dream. I just said we need to -- so I raised the money to send our guys back to school and get their degrees. One of the first people that I talked to seriously about it was Jim Rogers.

**So how did you meet Jim Rogers?**

The young man that used to give me all my hand-me-down clothes when I was a kid --

**Yes. Woodbury.**

Bruce Woodbury was his law partner. And that's how I met Jim, through Woodbury. Jim was a big sports fan and we just hit it off. And I told him about my idea about the basketball alumni. And I also told him I don't want us to be beholden to these boosters. I said we want to put on our own -- we want to raise our own money and not be beholden to anybody. He says okay. He said, well, where are you going to get the money to start it? I said I don't know. He says I'll give it to you, Jim. And that's how the conversation went; I'll give it to you. And he gave me \$25,000. That's a lot of money. I told him I wanted to bring UCLA's alumni in here to play against the Rebels alumni. And that would be our first fundraiser. Do you know we packed that place? And we made so much money we gave Jim his 25 grand back. However, because he believed in us, we embraced him and said, Jim, we want you from now on to coach the Rebel alumni. He said, well, what do you want me to do? We want you to coach the Rebels because I knew that he'd love that. He was a sports fan. He said me? I said, yeah, you. It didn't take much for him to say yes. He said okay.

**So how long was this around?**



Thirteen years.

**Really?**

Thirteen years.

**And a lot of guys went back and got degrees?**

Over a hundred. Now, let me tell you what happened. I want you to think about this. That's why they gave that big ceremony for me. I want you to think about this. When you start making money -- and we're a nonprofit organization -- you know, you have to spend that money. And so what happened was it got out there that we were sending our guys back to school. So the football players said, man, I wish we had a program like that. Make a long story short, we said, okay, you know what? We've got enough money; we'll send some football players back. Before you know it we were sending all the sports back, men and women, men and women. The Basketball Alumni was sending. Our program was the first program of its kind in the history of NCAA. We embarrassed the NCAA and became the catalyst to give that fifth year for an athlete to get their degree. Check the research. They never had that until us, until we started sending people back to school and getting all this notoriety.

When we would have an alumni game, it became very high profile because we'd bring in Magic Johnson and his alumni, Michael Jordan and his alumni. All of these were NBA pros and superstars. So to have those games I had to get it sanctioned by the NBA. To get a game sanctioned by the NBA, you had to have two NBA refs. So I got to know all the refs in the NBA because everybody wanted to come to Vegas to ref our games during off season. So I knew all the refs.

You had to have all those guys indemnified with insurance. The only insurance that would indemnify them was Lloyds of London and the only insurance company in town that could do it was Leavitt Insurance. So we started dealing at a very high level. Jim Rogers made all of that easy for us because he had money and he had influence. And then he put together an executive group of guys that oversaw us. They let us do what we wanted to do because from the very beginning I told Jim, I don't want to be answering to the booster organization. Some of the boosters were a part of these young men being exploited.

**So like an advisory group?**

Governor O'Callaghan; Sig Rogich, who ended up being my best friend, and number one mentor; Jim Rogers -- there were some more very affluent -- I know Governor O'Callahan, Sig Rogich. I can find out that first executive -- it was a who's who. So nobody touched us. Nobody hurt us. Everybody was pushing for us to send athletes back to school and get their degrees, to change the image of UNLV basketball

Then we started getting -- we put on the game. Now, this goes back to how I got in Caesars. I put on an alumni game, the first basketball game ever to be played at Caesars Palace. We flew in the portable floor of the old Utah Jazz. A guy named Ike Bishop owned the floor. We flew that floor in and we brought Bill Walton out of retirement to play with UCLA's illustrious group. Everybody was there because of Bill Walton playing for the first time in years and because Sports Illustrated and other sports media were there.

**So where did you put the floor? Where in Caesars did you put it?**

Where they used to play championship tennis indoors. And we packed that place out. Everybody was there. I became a very popular person because I'm putting on games with Magic and Michael and all of these people. So I would get calls from the governor's office. They wanted to sit on the floor so they could be seen. They had to go through me to get the tickets. So I got to know a lot of VIP people through my promotions. You know, I ingratiated myself with a lot of people.

And then Jim Rogers always helped me. You know, Jim back in the day would let us use his Rolls Royce to go pick up players or to let a player drive his car. Jim was just -- he's not the same guy I know now. He was really a different person. He was passionate about helping the little guy back in those days.

**Wow. That's amazing. That's wonderful.**

See, he's like night and day. He's not the same guy. I don't understand how -- you know, he's not the Jim that I knew. You know I sued the college.

**Yes. And we're going to get to that.**

I sued the college and I won. I got a settlement agreement from CSN [College of Southern Nevada]. I complained about the taking of my programs, my homeless program and my international program. I am the person who positioned CSN in Korea with innovative lectures in six universities one year and eight universities the next year.

**So this goes on for 13 years.**

Thirteen years. And we raised probably about three to \$4 million all those years. We only had that game. And then we would roast people. I showed you those pictures. We roasted Jerry Tarkanian with Steve Wynn. Then we roasted Reggie Theus. And then we got one of our roasts on television locally on Channel 13 when we roasted Sidney Green. That was on television. Then we used to have music videos every year. You haven't seen our music videos. We would have people starring in our video. Everybody loved our music videos. I'll tell you some of the stars that were in our music videos -- Sugar Ray Leonard, Jerry Lewis, Wayne Newton, the mayor, Jerry Tarkanian. You have to see one of our music videos to understand why each year everybody wanted to be in our video. We charged people to be in them, you know, not the big stars, but like different companies and stuff. So that's where all of my entrepreneur spirit started coming out. During the basketball alumni I was just coming up with all these original ideas to make money. And I don't know where that came from, but then it was just, you know, there.

We even had a Basketball Alumni Christmas Tree lot. We gave away a lot of trees. We did a television show with Wayne Newton at his home, called the Cowboy Christmas. If you Google Wayne Newton and Cowboy Christmas, you will see a one-hour special about the UNLV basketball Alumni Association.

**And during this time you went to work at Caesars?**

I went to work at Caesars. Now, the reason I got to Caesars was that I put on this big extravaganza that turned out to be great. One of the big executives, Billy Weinberger, Jr., met me and congratulated me on this. He thought I was a promoter like Don King or someone. And he says so when is your next venture? I'm sitting here with Billy Weinberger, Jr. And I said, well, probably next summer we'll do another event. He said, well, what do you do in between? I said I deal at Riviera. He looked at me. At the Riviera? You need to be dealing here at Caesars. And within two weeks I was dealing at Caesars. On top of that -- this is what this juice thing is all about.

**That's what I was going to ask you about. And I want you to explain juice to anybody listening to this who does not understand the concept.**

Juice is like -- how can I explain it? It's like in the minds of the people in this culture, it's almost

like you have God saying that it shall be. Now, I'm a Christian, but that's how people look at juice in this town. Billy Weinberger, Jr.? And so I got the job. I didn't even have to audition for it. They put me to work because I was a dealer. I was a dealer.

**Two and a half years at Riviera.**

Yeah. But normally you still have to audition. You still have to audition. I don't care if you have been. Not all the time. I would say I was one of the small percentage -- definitely a small percentage of blacks that got hired like that. But I've been blessed. I've been blessed by God. And so I got the job. So one day -- I'm on a dead game at Caesars.

**Tell me what a dead game is.**

Dead game means there are no people playing your game. You're just standing there like this.

**You're just standing at your table.**

When people come up, then you shuffle and you deal. I'm standing on a dead game and here comes god. Now, not the way I believe, but how the culture believes. Here comes "god." He comes and sits at my table where the floor men and everybody just stops. Billy Weinberger, Jr., is sitting on his table and they're laughing and they're talking. And so Billy tells me come up to my office on your break. And he tells the floorman, hey, Lonnie's going to be up in my office on his break. Okay.

So I go up there. I'm watching the clock because you only get a 20-minute break. And I said, Mr. Weinberger, I've got to go because -- he said that's okay. He called down to the pit; I got Lonnie up here. Okay, Mr. Weinberger. So now, I end up spending about 40 minutes, two breaks up there with him. Well, by the time I come down everybody knew. So now I'm the guy.

**You're anointed.**

I'm the one, man. I'm the one, right? And so while I was up there, Billy says, well, Lonnie -- remember this game that I had with Bill Walton was a big time thing. He says, well, Lonnie, is there anything else that I can do? Are you liking your job? Is it better than the Riv? I said, man, this is wonderful, because there a blackjack dealer back in the day you may get a high roller and everybody will walk home with -- I think one of our highest tips was like \$1200 in one day in cash. And you get it in an envelope that thick with hundred-dollar bills. Everybody got one that was a 21 dealer that day. We got spoiled quickly..

**Okay, I see.**

So when you walked around Las Vegas with your Caesars Palace outfit on as a dealer, you were the baddest thing going because it was very -- they had the Caesars medallion and all that. It was just a culture, casino culture. And so when I was up there I said, well, you know, I was looking at baccarat. He says you like baccarat? I liked it because they had the tuxedos and they were making grand theft money. Now, we were making probably 70, 80 grand back in those days when the dollar was strong. They were making over six figures, the baccarat dealers. This is before the IRS got involved.

And I said, man, wow. I said one day I'm going to go to dealing school and learn how to deal baccarat. I said I kind of know how to deal it. When I was talking to him -- this is how God be doing my life -- He picks up the phone and called the head of baccarat. Hey, Eddie Mahlan, can you come around here? I need to talk to you. So the guy second in command for baccarat, the guy that a lot of people pay 25 grand to get the job, he comes up. Yes, sir. He sees me sitting in front of him with my white shirt on. He's all smiles. And Billy says, you know, I want this young man here -- this is Lonnie -- I want him to start breaking in on baccarat.

Never did a black break in, never. Very few whites break in. So I started breaking in baccarat. They hated me, all the dealers, the shills etc. I didn't care being black in America, I was use to not being accepted. I flourished under that pressure, similar to the cool you saw Barack Obama display during his run for President. The more the opposition to a black man wanting to become President, with lies and hateful talk, the more he stayed cool.

All of the coworkers, all of the baccarat shift. They hated me. They were so jealous and so hateful. I thrive in that type of atmosphere. It don't bother me. When I see people who are like that and want to try to beat me down, I rise to the occasion on stuff like that. I can tell you a lot of instances where I did that. Usually it occurs a lot of the time with African American males. Some of us come and some can't handle the pressure., but I won't.

**Give me an example of a good night at baccarat in Caesars Palace. Who's at your table?**

Oh, a good -- when you say a good night, I'm thinking money.

**Oh, well, that too. But I want to know --**

I've dealt to Gladys Knight, a whole lot of celebrities, a lot of rich people from all over. Back in

those days the high rollers were from Latin America before the devaluation of the peso. So we used to do the baccarat game in Spanish. (Speaking Spanish.) But we would deal the game in Spanish to cater to the psychographics of our high rollers. And then when the valuation of the peso went down, then that's when we looked to the east and brought in the Asians. So a good night at Caesars, a real good night, [meant] four or five grand and come back two, three grand the next day. I mean, you know, in cash. So you know what that does to a young person's head?

**So now, at this point are you beginning to save some of this money?**

No. Because it wasn't going to never end.

**That's right.**

It wasn't going to ever end.

**So, Lonnie, how do you spend a night when you've made \$3,000, \$4,000? How do you spend it?**

Go out and buy something or go and take care of my mother, my grandmother. Give them money. I mean I was very generous. If you talk to my mother or my grandmother, they'll say -- well, I'm not going to brag on myself. But I always wanted my people to have. I didn't make it in the pros. And I always wanted to buy my mother a house. So whatever I could do for my family, I would do.

**Okay, great. So now, how do you go from that to getting into the university system, into the college university system?**

I hated the mentality of -- the casino mentality. It was racist. It was sexist. It was superficial. It was what you had. I hated that. I hated it. It was a very, very, very phony atmosphere. And some people could be your friend one day and the next day they'll cut your throat because they never were your friend. You know, it was just what you had.

Give you an example. When I left Caesars I went to the Sands to go on the floor in baccarat with a vice president named Neil Smythe. He became the president. Here are all of these blessings from God that I'm getting. You know what I'm saying? Now, I'm sitting in the chair, still young, now, watching the game in a suit, watching the baccarat game. I wasn't no great baccarat dealer. And I got that because Mr. Neil Smythe was the president and I ingratiated myself with him because he was into table tennis. And when I had my alumni games, at halftime I

would let him and his people play table tennis. You know, at the level that they play table tennis it was something to watch because they'd get the ball and go back to almost -- I mean almost full court hitting that ball. And the people go crazy. So Mr. Smythe loved me. So he knew he was going to get the job as the president of Sands. He says, Lonnie -- because he knew it was tumultuous. I was having all kind of problems in baccarat. I never ran and told --

**Weinberger.**

Never. Never. I handled it myself.

**So how did the person from the Sands know that you were having problems, but Caesars didn't?**

He was the vice president of Caesars. And he became the president of the Sands. And he took me with him. And you never leave a job like Caesars to go -- but the job at the Sands was just as good because they had less ways of splitting. And they had a lot of great entertainment over there. And their 21 pit was making a lot of money.

**But now, you weren't a dealer any longer. So were you --**

No, no. I was dealing part time in baccarat and in 21. He knew that these guys were trying to stop me from getting full time in baccarat. And so he came to me because his son was on the floor and he told his dad about it. And so he told me, hey, listen, I'm about to become the president -- it was all sort of surreal -- at the Sands. I'm listening to him and it's like is this a dream? He said I'd like you to come with me. I said you would? He says I'm going to put you on the floor. You'll make a hundred-something dollars a day plus you'll be in on the zooks, which are the tips. So now that's big time for a black kid, for a white kid or any kid. Big, big, big, big time. And so I go with him over there. And he stayed for six months and they fired Mr. Smythe.

**Oh, no.**

Now, this is where I told you about how phony the business was. I already hated the business. I was going to school to get my master's while I was at Caesars.

**UNLV?**

At UNLV I was going to school to get my master's. 1984 I graduated. So that ought to tell you. I started my master's program almost immediately. And guess how I got my master's? Through the Basketball Alumni Association, the program that I started to send athletes back to school. We

started a master's program. I got my degree. So that's why I say every time people call me, they say how you doing? I say God is good. I don't care who calls me. I say that to them. And here I got a basketball scholarship for my undergraduate degree. Got my master's through a program that I started.

**So was it a conflict of interest or had you stepped away from it?**

No. A conflict for interest for what?

**That you're part of the structure of the Basketball Alumni Association.**

No. No, no, no. That was like leading the way and being an example. The criteria was that you were a former athlete and do you have the grades to go into the master's? I wasn't the only athlete in the master's program. There were other athletes in it, too.

**That's wonderful.**

Yeah. So I got my master's. 1984 I got my master's. Then I started getting into business. I made so many contacts. You know, I'm here. I made a lot of contacts. Sig Rogich and I -- if you look up Cigars of the World, Google that at McCarran Airport and see what you get. See what you get. That was my first big entrepreneur deal.

**Wow. And anything at the airport.**

Yeah. And so my partner -- show you how God is -- put up all the money. Sig Rogich put up all the money.

**He was your partner.**

My partner. I came up with the idea. And because Sig was who he was, we had the only concession in the airport [whose] sign could move. There was a rule that your sign could blink, but it could not move. But Sig had gone out and designed this world that turned around.

**It rotated just like the Earth.**

Rotated like the Earth. And it's Cigars of the World. And so I don't care if you're two football fields away from our concession you saw that. And back in those days the psychographics was perfect because cigars were all about winning.

**That's right.**

So when people would come into Vegas they'd get their cigars because they figure they're going to win. These were hand-rolled cigars. The average hand-rolled cigar cost about ten bucks. We had



cigars that cost \$25, \$30 for one cigar. So it was a good business. But look that up, Cigars of the World.

**I will.**

We'll talk later about it. And then I got into the television game. Once you get into those business circles, it just comes at you. Then a friend of mine introduced some gentlemen out of Texas. These guys were looking to compete with Cathy Hughes of TV One. Well, these white guys were trying to recruit a black with a skill set to run a network. An African-American that was sharp enough and this and that -- and a friend of mine brought them to my office. And they said, you know, we've been looking at you. These guys were from Texas said, you're perfect. You're a professor. You're articulate. You're this. You're that. We'd like you to head up a television network. A television network? What one you talking about here? What kind of television network? He says, well, it's going to be called Urban American TV Network.

Man, I took off running with that. That was right up my alley. I started using all my business contacts. They loved it. Anyway, we ended up selling that television network. We had 22 million households watching our programming, down south and the eastern seaboard. You can look that up too, Urban American TV Network. And it was a publicly traded company. So it's got a history. And it will tell you all about me. We sold that when we had 22 million households watching. It was me and my son that made that happen.

**Wow. Now, tell me how you got from the Sands into the college system.**

When Mr. Smythe got fired, all those little smiles turned into frowns. They really hated me.

**Probably the way you came in and everything.**

Remember this is a racist town. They don't think a black should have anything. I never was like OJ and forgot who I was and where I come from. And so I always kept it black because of my background. That rubbed a lot of people wrong, too, because I've always been self assured and independent and spoke my mind. A lot of people didn't bother with me because I had such juice. So when he got fired I became a target. They took me out of being a boss and put the tuxedo on me and said you can deal baccarat now. I said, okay, well, all right. I still was making my -- I dealt for about two months. They took me out of there and put me in a 21 pit and said okay -- they were trying to get me to quit. What happened was I started a movement for a union, to protest

jobs. That's the type of guy I am. I started doing the union thing. It didn't really make it, but it almost took off. I really became a target then. And so Steve Wynn -- I knew I could go to Steve and get a job. I went to Steve and he said say no more and put me in the baccarat pit. That was my last job in the casino business.

**So that was at where, the Mirage?**

No. That was downtown at the Golden Nugget. That was my last job. And guess what job I went to after that? I became a part of a ministry team for one of the largest Christian churches in Las Vegas. And my job was to start the first Christian college in the state of Nevada.

**Okay. Did you start it?**

No. It fell through. And that's another long story. It fell through. But I even had Tarkanian interested in the idea. Tark was always helping me. He was going to send some of his great junior college players to my school because now he can watch them right here in Vegas instead of them being in Odessa, Texas -- Larry Johnson and all of those guys. They could go to school here, to private school, and he can watch them. Now, when they're playing for my Christian school, we're going to fill it up because these are great ball players that are going to play at UNLV. It was a wonderful plan. But what happened was one of our pastors had a little problem with a female in our church and it split our church and that was the end of it.

**Now, this was going to be a school on what level? College? High school?**

Yeah, college. It was going to be the first Christian college in Nevada history. Matter of fact, there is no Christian college in this state. We were going to be the first. And we were this close to making it happen.

**Wow. While you were at the Sands did you know Jimmy Gay?**

Jimmy Gay -- I lived on A Street. Mr. Gay lived on B Street. I knew his sons, Phillip and James Gay, Jr. He died. And Mr. Gay died. His sisters were older than me. I didn't know them that well. They were like -- once you -- at that age -- not at the age I am now. They would be contemporaries. But at that age they were like five, six years older than me. So it was out there. I never knew them. But I knew Phillip and James Gay, Jr.

**Did Jimmy Gay work at the Sands at the same time you were there?**

Yeah. They loved Jimmy. You know, in this racist Las Vegas that we lived in, there were some

people that just had a gift to navigate. He was one.

**And it sounds like you were another one.**

I did pretty good. I didn't have enough functional Uncle Tom in me. You know, that's a concept that I learned in black history, being a functional Uncle Tom. In other words, you don't make any waves, but you really don't like what's going on. You know there's double standards and there's racism and that people are talking to you condescendingly. You look past it to put food on the table. I didn't have enough of that. And thank God that God knew I didn't have enough of that. So he never put me a position where I would just blow everything. So I've been blessed.

**Great. So after you got your master's degree, you decided you wanted to go to --**

I started teaching at UNLV part time in hotel management. And I wanted to be full time there so bad.

**So why didn't you -- did other people at the time have a Ph.D. or --**

No. No.

**Everybody just had a master's degree.**

There were some people with Ph.D.s. But there were people with full-time jobs with master's. And here I am bringing in Elaine Wynn and all these icons speaking in my class. I thought that would ingratiate me enough to get me -- remember I told you about that academic community that didn't like athletics.

**That's right.**

See, I was still one of Tark's Neanderthals. Only Dean Vallen, Dean Jimmy Vallen, took a liking to me. What a wonderful man. He saw something in me. He asked me to come and teach. I wasn't thinking about it. When I got my doctorate -- I mean my master's, he was on stage and he saw me and he knew I was one of the first blacks to graduate. That's when he reached out to me and said, hey, I want you to start teaching some classes.

**Good. So what were you teaching?**

The intro to hotel.

**So now, this is about --**

Well, '84 I got my master's. Probably '85, '86. I taught for about three years part time. I was going to go and get my doctorate. But what happened was I got recruited by the American

College of Singapore. That's another long story.

**Now, this is when you got into the Asian market. So part of that I want to hear.**

Okay. What happened was you know I put on all those games out at the Thomas & Mack. Well, there was a young vice president over at Caesars that called me up. His name is Don Guiliomino. He called me up and he says, Lonnie, we've been toying with this idea and I want you to come by my office and I'd like to talk to you about it. I said okay. Back in those days you could not market gaming in the Far East. You just could not. It just wasn't something that people would embrace.

And so they came up with an innovative way to market Caesars Palace in the Far East through the medium of sports. So they asked me to put together a team to travel to Taipei; Hong Kong; Seoul, Korea, and Singapore. We did that for three years running. I was the coach and I put the thing together and I got paid by Caesars Far East marketing. I was a part of Caesars Far East marketing through an innovative way of promoting Caesars through basketball games. We played city and national teams.

**And they wanted NBA level athletes?**

Uh-huh.

**So whom did you get?**

Well, I couldn't do NBA. I did guys that were at that level that didn't make the NBA. And with that said, we didn't lose a game.

**Who did you play against over there?**

National teams.

**Okay, great.**

Sold out crowds. I got film on that, too. See how God has blessed me.

**Oh, yes.**

See how God has blessed me. And now, here I am. I'm traveling with a group of ball players, predominately black, paid for by Caesars Palace, flying to different countries, playing basketball. I'm the coach. And so for three years I became very popular in Singapore, Taipei, and Hong Kong because here I come with my team again. And we would beat everybody by 20, 30 points and stuff like that.

And so Singapore was looking for a national coach. They asked me. They asked me

because they thought I was a great coach, because I come through there kicking everybody's butt. So it was between me and a Russian coach and they chose me. So I went to Singapore with a lot of fanfare. I knew everybody from the prime minister on down.

One of my big -- and I don't know if I sent this to you, a clipping in the Singapore Times where my team almost beat the rock stars, mainland China. Tell you how good mainland China was, when I was getting my team together was when I started learning about culture classes and the difference between cultures. I had a real learning experience. That's when I really started wanting to learn different languages through those experiences traveling.

When the Chinese team came to Singapore and we were going to play, my team, when they came to take the floor to just shoot around and stuff, almost everyone on my team from Singapore went over there to get autographs from them. Well, I called those guys back. I said, hey, hold it, come here. Let me tell you something. You can't ask for autographs from a team you want to beat. They were looking at me confused. I said no. See I'm coming from a Western point of view. So it was a culture clash of East and West thinking.

Let me tell you how this culture clash came to a head. I was able to bring two American players with me -- no -- three American players to play on this national team. I brought in Larry -- what's Larry's last name? I brought in two guys from Oklahoma. They were National Champions. And then I brought in Larry Anderson from Las Vegas from UNLV. They played on my team. So I put the Singapore players around these three guys. They started every game.

Remember I told you there was a Russian coach. There was a segment of Singaporeans that wanted him instead of me. So what happened was I inherited one of the coaches that wanted him. He was there to undermine my efforts, unfortunately.

**Undermine?**

Undermine, but it was passive-aggressive. He was very passive-aggressive from the very beginning. I felt it, but I couldn't discern it yet. You know, I could tell he was smiling and all that other stuff. And then I was able to connect all the dots. And then I said, okay, this guy wants me to fail because he don't want to lose face for me. If I become successful he lose face because he was pushing the Russian coach.

**That's right.**

So we started kicking everybody's butt. Now, China comes in. This is right before pre-Olympics. And I'm feeling my oats, man, because we were beating everybody. We had a game before the China game and the coach that I inherited as my assistant coach, he had four players that he wanted to see play. Those were his guys. But I didn't play them all the time because they weren't helping us win. I picked other people besides his players.

So we were playing in the game. I'm watching and I got into game—you know, once I get into something I get into it. And I get into the game and this guy is tapping me on the arm. And it was throwing my concentration off because I'm watching my players and this and watching the score and looking to see who's got fouls and trying to win the game, trying to pretend I was Tarkanian. So finally he taps me and I said what? Man, can't you see I'm watching the game, ba, ba, ba, ba, boo? Just like a normal American would do. Well, he didn't do anything. He just smiled.

And then I called a timeout. And I was looking for the team to come with me. Well, he took those four players and two more and went up in the stands. And I'm looking at him, the Russian coach, why is he up in the stands? And the guy that recruited me that was pushing me instead of the -- he comes down smiling at me. This is keeping face. I didn't understand keeping face. He was smiling: Lonnie, I must talk to you. You must go apologize to the coach. I say apologize for what? And he says you must go apologize or they will stay up there. I say apologize for what? What did I do? He says, well, you disrespected him. Make a long story short, I went up into the stands and apologized -- remember I can't hitchhike across this water.

**That's right. Yes.**

I'm in Singapore. So I go and I go apologize to the coach. The whole arena erupted in cheers. Everybody knew it but me. That's a culture clash. The whole arena [erupted]. There were about 15,000 people there. The whole arena knew it. Maybe they were saying something in Mandarin or something. I don't know. But everybody knew. When I went up and I looked at him, I said, hey, listen, if I've done anything to upset you, I'm sorry and blah, blah, blah. He shook my hand. He was smiling, phony smile. And when we shook hands the whole arena erupted in cheer. Ask Larry Anderson if that didn't happen.

That coach was looking for a moment like that to save face because he wanted the Russian

coach and he had to work for me. Strange way to prove a point.

**Wow.**

And so that's when I started understanding culture clashes and differences in the psychographics of my culture and their culture and I got intrigued with that. I got intrigued with that because I said I'll try to not put myself in that position again in front of all these people. And so we go on to play -- that incident brought us closer.

**So now, you're playing China.**

Now we go and play China. It's packed and everybody knew -- see, they bet on if raindrops would come down. You could be in a cab and two guys would be betting -- it's a part of their psychographics. It's a part of their lifestyle, betting. That's why Macau is such a big winner. It's a part of the Chinese culture. And that's not a stereotype. You see little kids -- scissor, paper, stone. Everybody is betting. So we were like a 30-point underdog in the Singapore Times. And everybody was betting against us. Well, guess what? At the halftime China was up by one point.

**Oh, my goodness.**

And every time we would get a point and get close to them, nobody cheered for us.

**Because everybody was losing those bets.**

That or they didn't want us to beat Mainland China. And our kids were excited. But they kept cool too. So now, we were supposed to go ahead of them at halftime. Larry Anderson shot that left-hand shot and a guy came out and fouled him. We knew he was fouled because when he hit the ground he slid almost to the half court line because over in Singapore you sweat a lot because there's intense humidity. He slid almost to half court and I go out to the ref. I say he fouled him. Look, he slid on -- he swallowed the whistle, no foul. The fix was in. They weren't going to let China lose against us.

**Oh, my goodness.**

And so the next half they probably beat us by about 15 points. But the Chinese coaches and all of the players came up and congratulated the American players and me. And our kids were treated like royalty, man, because we almost beat China. I'll send you that article. That was a big deal. So this is how I got recruited to teach in Singapore. So I'm getting all of this publicity. An American who had started a college called the American College of Singapore read about me and

that I had a hotel degree. He got in contact with me and he offered me a pretty nice salary for back in those days, 80 grand. And to work in Singapore with \$80,000, the American dollar was worth three sings (Singapore dollars), I would live like a king.

**So did you take it?**

No, I didn't take it. I'm going to tell you why I didn't take it. I helped him put the program together. I didn't take it because in the contract I could not come home and I was going through a divorce, too, and I had two kids. And I love my kids. When I would travel with Caesars, I'd bring my wife and two kids. I'll show you pictures of them. They got a lesson about foreign countries at a young age.

**Oh, I bet.**

So in my contract with them I could come home once if someone died and once for vacation. And I could bring my kids. They said you could bring your family, but I was going through a divorce. I told my wife at that time, you know these kids are going to get a great education here. You know how they are here. She wouldn't let them live with me. When my oldest got old enough, he said he wanted to live with his dad. So I kind of raised my son until I got married again.

I've been married three times. The first time I was right out of college and really too young. My first wife, in retrospect, was five years older and ready. However, I was a bit immature for marriage. We are still friends. My second marriage was to the mother of my kids.

**So you taught a little for them.**

Let me tell you why I know that this college here was wrong.

**So now, are we talking about UNLV?**

UNLV. I'd been teaching there for three years. Well, the dean called the dean of UNLV and asked him about me. And the dean gave him a glowing report and put it in writing. Well, I got that and I said, oh, you can write about me working over in Singapore, but I can't work in Las Vegas. So that was my first little struggle with that. The dean, of course, was not Dean Vallen who would have hired me. Dean Vallen retired.

**Yes. So when you did not take that job, then did you come back to United States?**

I came back here and I started working at CSN.

**So CSN became full time?**



Full time.

**In the hotel school?**

In the hotel school. In three years I became the department chair. And I got voted in twice for that. I was the only black in the department and still the only black in almost 30 years.

**Wow.**

Did you hear what I said?

**Yes.**

And still the only black. That's normal at CSN. CSN got some real professors that don't want a lot of diversity. Anyway, I'm the only black in that department professionally. But all my white colleagues voted me the head of the department twice.

Then I got raised up to be the dean of a whole new division called the Hospitality Institute. Then from dean I became associate vice president. But I had seen so much racism and double standards that I ended up speaking on that at a meeting at UNLV with the board of regents and the chancellor. And it hit television; the associate vice president said there was indeed institutionalized racism within the system.

**So now, at what point did you start this program with Singapore, Korea and all of them with the association with CSN?**

That was during the time when I was associate vice president.

**Tell me how that came about and what that led to and what that was all about. Now, is that called the old Hospitality Institute?**

The Hospitality Institute. What happened -- you know from me telling you my story I just was blessed. And I've always done things outside of the box. I've never been in awe of trying something. And then I had traveled the world before I had taken that job and I had made contacts in Singapore, different places. And so one contact told this guy named Mr. Pae, P-A-E, Mr. Brian Pae, Korean guy, to get in contact with me. Mr. Pae is a very wealthy Korean guy, but he has a heart for young people to send them to school from Korea because he made a lot of his money and he wanted to give back to his Korean nationals. He made all his money in manufacturing. And so there was a money-making venture of sending people from Korea here.

He and I became the best of friends. I still call him on the phone right now and speak

Korean to him. He still calls me Mr. Wright. He tells everybody I'm his brother. But I've traveled with him. He and I got together and I shared with him how I use athletics to promote gaming with the tours I did for Caesars Palace. I said I can do the same thing through a lecture. I can go and lecture at these universities and colleges about the hotel business and about Las Vegas. And everybody's intrigued with Vegas. He was listening to me.

And guess what? Because he was such a big man in Korea, he called all these universities and colleges. I spoke to six universities and colleges the first year and eight universities my second lecture tour.. And it was just an innovative way to promote CSN to Koreans. And with those Koreans coming here comes with a big price. And now I'm --

**When you say a big price, what do you mean?**

Because they have to pay more money to go to school here. And that's a big part of our budget.

**Okay, good.**

And so here you have a black man -- actually, before Mr. Pae and I got together, you could count the Koreans on one hand that went to CSN. So I am directly the reason why they have so many Koreans at UNLV by way of CSN, through an innovative lecture tour to recruit. It's well documented, but CSN suppressed it. So the next year -- or two years later Mr. Pae -- you know, on top of recruiting all those kids through my lectures, not a dime came from the college. Mr. Pae paid for my trip and my wife's trip. So do you think that the college would be happy with my innovation? No. They hated me. They hated me even though I was bringing a lot of money to the college. They still didn't like me. Individuals didn't like me.

**But why because now you're at CSN?**

People that cannot don't like people that can; especially if you're not one of the good ole boys or in their network of cronies.

**I see what you're saying.**

They're just bureaucrats. And they hold on to these tenured positions and they never challenge the kids to get better. They don't understand diversity. Nor do they embrace diversity, hence it is a threat to them. A fearful threat, hence it undoes the lies and the stereotypes put into play, to render some with a superiority complex and others with an inferiority, self-hate complex. They're stuck on stupid. And they're the very opposite of what education should be about.

**Exactly.**

Education should be the antidote to that type of ignorance and the antidote to the social ills impacting our world. That's what education should be. I've always told people that if this is a church then a university should be right there almost on the same par. It should have integrity. It should have all of these things. But the people that I work with at CSN, it's under this table.

So the bottom line is I was bringing in a lot of money and they brought this white lady in who -- and I'm not going to mention any names -- went to Korea. All she heard was Professor Wright, Professor Wright, Professor Wright. She dismantled my name, got with the president and became my boss and took my program and is right now today making millions of dollars for CSN. That's the truth. That's the truth.

So now, took that innovation of me going, positioning in the minds of the consumer -- and the people love me over there. They never heard of CSN. They knew Lonnie. They knew about me coaching. They've seen my career as a coach coming through Seoul, Korea in another life, you know.

Anyway, when they took my program, that's when the gloves came off and that's when I became in their opinion very radical. But I just wasn't going to have it. And it took me five years to get it straight. It still is not straight because she's still got the program and the money. They took my associate vice president title. They did all of that. But look how God blessed me.

**That's right. That's right. Look at this.**

Look how God blessed me.

**Yes. So you lost the title, but you're still a full-time professor over there?**

Yeah. They couldn't take my tenure from me. They tried to fire me and take my tenure. They did a bunch of lying on me. And then I had to get people that I knew that they wouldn't fight. They tried to say that I was mishandling some comps that they signed off on. And the owner, Mr. -- can I name him?

**The owner of?**

The owner of these three hotels that --

**Oh, yeah. That's fine.**

Mr. Randy Black wrote a letter and told them Lonnie Wright don't have to steal anything. He was

my friend before the college and my friend after the college. And Lonnie knows if he ever needed anything for his family or him, I would -- he wrote that in a letter. And that's what stopped that whole lie.

**Okay, good.**

That's what stopped that. His letter is the reason why they had to do a settlement agreement with me. They tried to say I did all of that. And it wasn't me. It was them that was doing it.

**Wow. At one point you worked with Steve Wynn --**

Yes.

**-- on a special program at the Bellagio. Tell me how that came about and what that was all about.**

Like I said, my life has been nothing but a dream. But I have to tell you this. I have always been faithful to God. During those alumni games when I brought in those illustrious ball players, we would have a word of prayer before the National Anthem, God honored. Now, that game at Caesars Palace -- you know, being a promoter you've got to keep everything in line. Some of these ball players will drive you crazy, especially if you have an itinerary for the press. And I had just got through -- I'm going to just be honest -- cussing out a couple of them ball players.

I go up to my pastor right before the game. I say, pastor, you know, we're getting ready for the National Anthem. You know we do the prayer before the National Anthem, Pastor Pat Walsh. And he looked at me. And I don't know what happened. Maybe God was going to scoot me in my place. And pastor looked at me and said, well, Lonnie, I'm not going to pray today. I thought he was kidding because this is the same guy who wanted me on his staff to open up a Christian college. So I thought he was kidding. He says, no, Lonnie, I'm not going to pray today. I say why not, Pat? He said because you're going to pray.

I said, oh, and I'm breaking out in a sweat. I'm talking about sweating, man, because I knew I was unworthy. I had just got through cussing somebody out and getting on their case and I wasn't in the right spirit. I'm a promoter now. And so I ended up doing that. I ended up praying with the microphone in front of all these people. And that was the breaking point of me getting myself back together because I was getting off track. So God put me back.

But we utilized the Basketball Alumni Association as a ministry. A lot of people didn't

know that. Jim knew it as a ministry. When we would have free basketball camps, we would bring in all these stars and stuff. But we would talk to the kids about drugs and gangs and we'd talk to them about Christ.

**Okay, good.**

My two right-hand guys, Ron Dell and Richard Box became ministers. I'm the only one that didn't become a minister. Richard Box right now has a church. Ron Dell passed away. He had a church. That was the Basketball Alumni. However, I do minister to those who seek Christ; a minister without a church.

So anyway, God anointed the Basketball Alumni. It was a Christian organization and everybody knew it. At first when we started praying, we heard, oh, I didn't come here to hear no prayer. You know, people got beer in their hand. They come here to see these ball players. But it was on our heart to witness to them about Christ in any way we could because God gave us that platform.

There's another thing that we did that a lot of people don't realize. Tarkanian helped us. We started a program called Stop Drugs. I have to send you a picture of that. It had a big stop sign that said stop drugs. On the back of the shirt it says agape, God's love, unconditional love. Well, guess what? The Rebels were number one. And I got Coach to let them run out on national television with "Stop Drugs" and "Agape" on their jerseys. And the news commentator says, what's this? The Rebels, what is that they got on their jerseys? Oh, "Stop Drugs". What's that word, "agape"? And one guy -- and this is on television, now. One guy says that's agape. That's unconditional love. Well, I guess that's how you stop drugs. That happened.

**That's wonderful.**

That happened.

**My favorite church in Los Angeles is Agape.**

That happened. So I know God has had His hand on all of this. All of this. His hand has been in it, in my life when those people tried to lie on me and this. The owner of the hotel -- oh, no. That ain't going to happen. He put it in writing.

**Great. So getting back to the Bellagio thing.**

What happened was I got recruited by the mayor of Detroit. And let me tell you how. See, I'm

telling you --

**You're at CSN at this time?**

I'm at CSN. But I'm a promoter from basketball. I promote whatever I'm in, whether it's the food business, television business. You know, God has given me that. And so I'm promoting CSN as the number one two-year institution for hospitality in the world. That's where I would do all my -- you know. And what was my rationalization? And I came up with this myself. My rationalization is because we have at that time 19 of the largest hotels in the world and we have relationships with that industry where our kids can go and work and do internships and stuff like that. I said there's no other place. And that was my rationalization. And now people are using that. That came from me. But that's how I got them to realize they had to go to -- because the Koreans were going to Switzerland and were going -- I got them to go to CSN. Now they're going to UNLV.

**Yes.**

But it started with a black man. And they'll never, ever -- I can document it to the date and look at the statistical data of how these kids started coming here.

But anyway, the way I got into the thing with Detroit, Mayor Archer, before the pending opening of gaming -- and this is kind of like a little short story to tell you. Mayor Archer of Detroit was looking for preferably an African-American that knew the hotel and casino side. And they searched and searched. At the time I had started a company that had been in operation for about seven years called Hospitality International. I would go and train and open up Native American casinos. It sounds like ten lifetimes. But this is what God has done.

I'm going to tell you the cold part about it. When 9/11 hit, you know, the first thing they do is they start laying off a lot of blacks. You know, you have to layoff. And usually black people are some of the first to go.

**Yes. Because we're last hired.**

Yeah. Last hired, first ones fired. I'm glad you brought that up. That's going to lead into some things. Anyway, I would get together with -- see, we as black people had to learn this business on the rough side of the mountain. We know it. We know this business.

**Well, we know hospitality.**

We know hospitality. Anytime you can smile after getting whipped with a whip and you're working all day long and they done sold your momma off and you're still smiling, you know, that's hospitality. Can't nobody beat that.

**That's right.**

So the bottom line is I would open up these Native American casinos to the point that Native Americans know me all over this country. I even went up to Canada to train Aborigines. Aborigines are in Australia. Aborigines are in Canada. And I did that through a Las Vegas connection. I can't think of her name right now. Her father was one of the big owners of Circus Circus. I can't think of her name for some reason. But anyway, they recruited me because they knew I knew how to train from front of the house to back of the house, from front desk to -- all of it. And I hired predominately all blacks. And I called my group the "Soul Patrol." So we would go into these Native American places and actually train them and teach them the gaming business. One particular -- and this is going to lead all the way to --

**Okay, good.**

So one particular place, the Kickapoo Nation down in Eagle Pass, Texas. The first language, Kickapoo. Second language, Spanish, broken English. I took a group of black dealers that got laid off during 9/11 and they went down south with me for about two months. I didn't stay the whole time, but I left them down there. And we trained the people up and opened up their casino. And I've done that several times, in Michigan, Oklahoma, Arizona. I've done training with Native Americans for years.

And so they heard about all of that, the guy over the people in Detroit was trying to find a black. Well, they found me. They recruited me. And I ended up training their entire gaming unit, about 500 dealers. And so all of the hotels and casinos that were going to Detroit trying to get in, they got there and saw me. And they saw how I was received, right? And so I believe -- but I was always friends with Steve. I believe Steve wanted to show Detroit that he could take the same criteria what they were going to do in Detroit. He wanted that bid over there. He wanted to open up his casino over there. So he wanted to set up a prototype. And the prototype was -- you didn't have to have any gaming experience. You had to be able to pass a drug test. And you couldn't have an extensive criminal past. And you could be a dealer.

### Captions for Following Pages

Lonnie Wright has become an important spokesperson for Las Vegas community. The following photos highlight a few of the numerous people and countries that he has touched with his message as an educator and promoter of Las Vegas.

**Photo 1:** As a professor of hotel management at UNLV, Lonnie immediately tapped into local hospitality leaders such as Elaine Wynn.

**Photo 2:** At College of Southern Nevada, Lonnie found opportunity in traveling to Asian countries to promote the benefits of hotel and hospitality management college education available in Las Vegas.

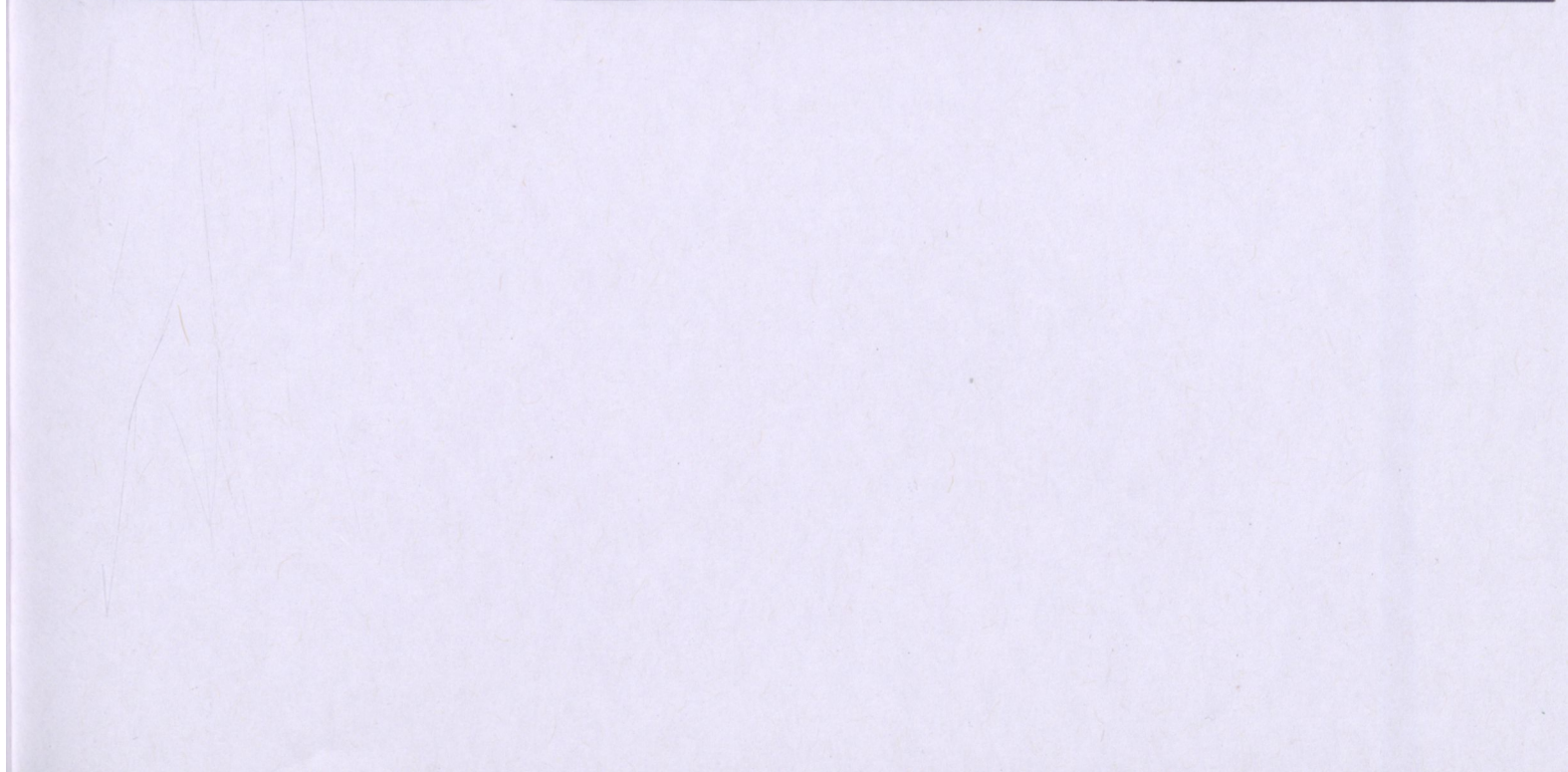
**Photo 3:** Photos from a Hospitality Institute event for guests from China.

**Photo 4:** Professor Wright with Asian students at CSN campus.

**Photo 5:** Native American casino workers are among the groups that Lonnie has trained. Here he is in Michigan with his partner Dana Rideout (far right).

**Photo 6:** Youthful offenders in the prison system have also benefited from Lonnie Wright's expertise. He poses with co-presenters outside High Desert prison. *Left to right:* Chef Bow Hampton, Warden Hatcher, Board of Regents member Linda Howard, Lonnie, and Chef Jeff Henderson.









Gov. Deng Ben Tai of Qing Hai Province in China giving speech



Prof. Wright of CCSN welcomes the guests from China



Lt. Gov. Lorraine Hunt & Gov. Deng Ben Tai discussing future education



Prof. Lonnie Wright Associate V.P of CCSN observing the festivities with Guests



Ceremony of Establishment of Friendship between the State of Nevada USA and Qing Hai Province of PR China









So guess what? Mr. Baldwin and Steve Wynn got in contact with me and says, Lonnie, we want you to train 150 dealers. Now, this is under the auspices of CSN Hospitality Institute. Well, I have to make money, right, because I'm on soft money. I'm on soft money in that position. That's why they put me that position because they knew I was a hustler. They knew I could get it done and bring money to the college.

So I met with Bobby Baldwin. I've known Bobby for 30 years. Bobby started off as a gambler. I used to see him down at the Horseshoe gambling. Now he's a big man. But he's smart, though. He's very smart. A lot of people got a lot of range and he's one of those guys with a lot of range. And so he says, Lonnie, we want you to recruit and train 150 dealers. So I'm thinking, man, that's going to be a lot of money for the college. And he says we want them to be black. I said what? This is wonderful because they had stopped hiring blacks. They had stopped hiring blacks.

**Because after the 80s, after the consent decree --**

They stopped hiring blacks. Remember -- put down MGM diversity training. Then I'm going to tell you -- let me address that after this.

So I went to Dr. Sullivan. You know Dr. Sullivan?

**Yes.**

I said, Dr. Sullivan, I need to recruit some blacks that's going to be a part of the statistical data that's going to be successful. Dr. Sullivan started sending me all these kids with degrees and everything. But they were going to make a lot of money working at Bellagio.

**That's right.**

So a lot of my kids were highly educated, even Dr. Meacham's son.

**Oh, good. Yes.**

Paul Meacham's son, I got him hired not only at the Bellagio, but when Wynn opened up I pulled him and put him over there. Ask Dr. Meacham about some of the things that we try to do.

So I started recruiting these kids through friends like Dr. Sullivan, other black fraternities. So I recruited a lot of focused kids. Some kids were not as focused. But they needed a break too. I trained a lot of Ethiopians. And they normally don't -- they shy away from us normally. But I had a very good Ethiopian friend who is a lawyer. And her son needed help. So I got him. Then that

led to about ten more Ethiopians. But they were black.

Steve Wynn kept his word. He hired every one of them. They did not have any gaming background. They could pass a drug test. And so he said to Detroit, see, for the most expensive hotel known to man at that time, the Bellagio, I did this. I can do it in Detroit. With all of that fanfare that Steve did and the great job he did with us, he didn't get the nod to be one of the places. I don't know why. But he didn't get the nod. He should have, though.

And so prior to that -- you know, I'm a pretty bold individual.

**Yes, you are.**

And so I told Bobby Baldwin.

**Now, who is Mr. Baldwin?**

He was the vice president of table games. He was the vice president of the hotel, very good friends with Steve. I mentioned to them, I said, I don't want my kids to be treated like the people when they tried to go into New Orleans. You have to understand why I divested this company and started Wright Foods because there is an initiative in Louisiana and in Detroit mandated by law that they have to do so much work with blacks.

That's what I tried to tell my partners here at Shetakis. But we were doing so well here, they didn't want to invest into these other areas. So I had to do it myself. And when I went to Cuba I told them there was an opportunity there because I had a partner that was just sitting at the right time at the right table where Cuba wanted a Latino or a black company that was in food and they got us.

**So before we start that -- we haven't talked about the food yet -- you were going to tell me about --**

Well, let me finish. So we got that on and we got those kids. We had a graduation at CSN. There's a film on that. There's a film on our graduation. Ask that guy that did that other film -- **Stan Armstrong.**

He's got that film on our graduation that night.

Anyway, 9/11 hit and they kept their word. Some of our kids got -- last ones hired, first ones fired. They were off for maybe a month or two. He put them all back to work. Steve kept his word. He and Bobby Baldwin kept their word. And that's one thing about Las Vegas. This is



another part of the culture. If you're in with the right people, it doesn't matter what color you are, you're in the family. Like my Uncle "Gold Dollar," he was black, but the Binions loved him like family, loved him like family.

And that's like -- remember this town 1931 in March became legal in gaming, okay? And at that time there was underground illegal gaming all over the United States. So that's when these boys came in and said, fellows, back up, it's legal over here. There were no publicly traded companies. That came from private money, dirty money, right? And the mob ran Vegas until Howard Hughes bought them out. Then we went to a corporate mentality.

But anyway, the thing about Las Vegas is that if you keep your word and you work hard and you're in with the right people and you do your thing, nine times out of ten you're going to progress whether you're black or white. Very few blacks do it. I was able to transcend some of that stuff. But this is a very racist town. I'm the first one to tell you. I was born and raised here. Very racist and very ignorant. Most of your people that were in the casinos were making hundreds and hundreds of dollars on a daily basis, like me; very few blacks were doing it or people with third or fourth grade educations. I used to equate those casinos to a coalmine because it was smoke. And coalminers don't normally have a lot of education. So they gravitate towards all that stupid stuff. And that's what you got out there. You can dress a pig up in a suit and they're still a pig. You know what I'm saying? And I'm not trying to say that condescendingly. I'm just saying you can't change people from inside, you know.

But we got that program on. We got those kids hired. And for the first time in the history of Vegas that many blacks had disposable income. So I tried to galvanize those young kids and say, listen, why don't you -- not for me, but for you -- why don't you put \$50 away? And I started bringing in black consultants, black bankers because I knew that we were going to have a group of blacks with a bunch of money. Yeah, Professor Wright, that sounds great. That sounds great, Professor Wright. I had all these meetings and we called the group Genesis. That was the name of the group. And everybody was in it. As soon as these young kids started making that money, they forgot all about Genesis until we only had about ten people coming.

**Too bad that you didn't start taking the \$50 out, putting it away before --**

You can't make people do that.

**I know. But like the university --**

Let me tell you what happened. Let me tell you how things go in a circle. When 9/11 hit they all go, Professor Wright, I got laid off. I got laid off. And I just basically said didn't I tell y'all that there may come a rainy day or there may come a racist person out there and you may need a lawyer or you guys can put your money together and start buying up land and let your money work for you instead of you work for money? Didn't I tell you to do this? Yeah, you did. I said you're on your own. Oh, professor -- I said you're on your own. But I still got on the phone and called up Bobby and said, hey, they're laying my kids off. And they put them back to work.

**Okay, good.**

But I had to put their nose in it. But as soon as they start making money -- here they come driving up in a Navigator and a brand-new this. I said, boy, you saving your money? Yeah, Professor Wright. I said, man, I know what cars go for. And then a lot of my kids got going above their heads with these houses and lost their houses and stuff, you know, tried to go from zero to hero. I said you can't do that.

**And the houses were so reasonable.**

Yeah. But when you look at the fine print.

**But we didn't.**

No, we didn't. And they transcended color of your skin. It hurt a lot of white folks.

**Oh, yes.**

This is the number one place.

**That was everybody. Uh-huh.**

But anyway, that was a great program. That's one of the wonderful parts of my life is to see those kids get those jobs. And guess what? White people lied on my kids and said that they were welfare. I had to straighten that out. I had floormen say, oh, they're a bunch of welfare kids. These kids had education. They come from good families. And they were just -- you know, just ignorant white folks calling them welfare kids. And so I called up Bobby Baldwin and I called up another guy. And they cut that off. They stopped that. I said no, they're not. They're from a special program from CSN. And a lot of these kids have better educations than you. They got that out there. Steve kept his word. Elaine and Steve, they're good people. I can honestly say that

they're good. You know, no one's perfect.

**That's right.**

But if they put their word out there, they keep it.

**Yeah. Because I hate to see them going through what they're going through now.**

It's the second time they've done that.

**I know.**

No. Third time. They may get back together. They may get back together.

**Okay. Who is Dean Kelly?**

Remember you told me not to talk about people that -- you want to take it off the record?

**No. Just identify the person. Just tell me was that CSN?**

Uh-huh.

**Okay. That's CSN. Is that the female?**

Huh-uh. If you turn that off, I'll tell you who he is.

**So we're back. And now we want to talk about -- and I have to be careful with the time. I think we already have two and a half hours. So we probably have enough space for another hour, but no more than that. I want to talk about the food business and how your family started Wright Foods.**

Okay. Well, after we sold our stock in Urban American Television Network, my wife and I took off some time because I had worked myself into what I considered kind of bad health. I was over 300 pounds because I was traveling. I was stress eating. I was an African-American in the first publicly traded television network in the history of FCC. I was out the door before Cathy Hughes. Remember I told you I should have been Cathy Hughes. My whole dream was to go across the United States catering to the urban programming. And so I had gotten to a point where -- matter of fact, some people wanted to buy us. And my son, Saron, went to the airport to pick them up. And I had just gotten off the phone because I had talked to one of the stockholders and told them if the price was right I was going to sell. And so he and I got into an argument. And I got so heated that when I hung up the phone I couldn't stop my heart from beating fast. I was overweight and I thought I was having a heart attack. Now, remember these people are coming in to buy my company.

And so I told my wife and she rushed me to the hospital. Well, when the people find out you've got real good insurance, they start playing games. They put the thing under my tongue, the explosive stuff, nitro. They put nitro under there. They gave me morphine. After I got that morphine, I felt like a champ. I figured I'm fine, I'm ready to go, I'm ready to go make this deal. And they said no, your blood pressure, this, that and the other.

And so my son called me on my cell phone. He said, Dad, I got the people. We're going to the office. How long is it going to take you to get here? I said, son, I'm in the hospital; I cannot go. Make a long story short, they put me in intensive care. And that's when I started losing weight and I ran in that marathon.

**Good. Fantastic.**

That's why I turned my whole life around. But before that me and my wife took several thousands of dollars, went to Paris and London. She set up a beautiful trip for us in New York. One night I'm this close to James Earl Jones. He's doing On Golden Pond. The next night we go see Denzel Washington. She has always been into the arts. Unfortunately, the only arts I've been attracted to -- not attracted to because I don't go to these type of places -- is casinos and that stuff. Or the girl on the poles and stuff like that, I don't go to those types of places. So I got smitten with watching a person like you right in front of me changing their expressions and making it affect me. I never knew that that was possible. I never knew. But my wife grew up in the San Francisco Bay area. And so anyway, so now we started traveling back and forth looking at different plays every chance we get to New York.

**Have you been to Lion King here yet?**

My wife has. And she just bought me tickets for me to go this Sunday with her.

**Go, because I went with a lady who saw it in New York and said this production is better.**

I am going. Better, yeah. How did I get off on that? I'm sorry.

**We were talking about how you got sick and how you changed your life.**

So I got sick. Anyway, I ended up selling the company. I had a lot of disposable income. Took off, me and my wife. I lost weight. I started training. And my son being young, says, dad, I'm going to roll this and get into some more stuff. He's the one that founded Shetakis. And he kept telling me about it for six months. I said, man, I don't really want to get back into the business.

He said, dad, you know, they went into receivership. This is perfect for you. You know everybody in town. Boom, you'll be the first minority owned company of this size in the state of Nevada. He kept telling me, but I didn't want none of that. I just finished with all of that pressure.

Make a long story short, I started looking into it. And then he started getting people to lobby me to get into this. And some of these people were very high profile. Do you know that Oscar Goodman has a piece of this company, a small piece?

**Oh, fantastic.**

Cliff Findlay of Findlay Oldsmobile got a small piece. So a lot of the people that I knew growing up had a piece of it. And Mr. Jim Shetakis was the king of wholesale food. I knew him as a kid, you know, of his work. He used to give a lot of food away to kids.

**So this company has been around for how long?**

Fifty years. I'm going to take you on a tour.

**Okay, good.**

Fifty years. Fifty years. And Jim Shetakis was a hands-on guy. And I tried to talk to people that knew him to try to be like him because he built this company from nothing. And he was the guy for all the hotels out there.

**Now, is this Japanese?**

No. Shetakis is -- because you said Japanese it threw me off -- Greek. Shetakis. Hard-working man. And I think that what hurt -- this is what I heard. I don't know this to be conclusive. His two sons died and it was told to me it broke his heart. And the company went into receivership. And the people that I got involved with were the people that bought it out. So I got into this business. And we've broken records.

**So what kind of records? Tell me what you mean by broken records.**

Well, when we first bought the business, we were doing about 35 million. And now this year we should do over 85.

**Now, tell me what the business is.**

It's a wholesale distributing business. What we do is buy certain things at lower margins and sell them at higher margins and make our money that way. We have the school district account.

**So this is all food.**

### Captions for Following Pages

Lonnie is community activist and a successful entrepreneur, having owned Wright Foods and Shetakis Wholesalers.

**Photo 1:** Fund raising for Katrina Hurricane victims who had relocated to Las Vegas. Lonnie (left) is pictured with William Shack, Las Vegas car dealer, and Rev. Jesse Jackson.

**Photo 2:** Saron Wright, Lonnie's son, delivered 100 turkeys donated to Katrina victims for the holidays.

**Photo 3:** 2008 trip to Cuba included a party for Lonnie and Wright Foods. Lonnie and his host a Cuban dignitary are shown in this photo watching U.S. election returns at the party.









No. We have over 6,000 SKUs. See, SKUs are skews, which means different items. 6,000 of them. It's kind of like built around the hotel business because that's our biggest client. We do plastic forks, plastic plates, I mean you name it, plastic bags, plastic gloves. I mean I can't name all 6,000.

**But this is all geared around the hotel industry in a way.**

Our bigger clients are basically the hotel business and the school district.

**So is it all geared toward food? Could I say that and be safe?**

Yes. It's a wholesale food company, yeah. A lot of our stuff is geared around food and what supports food. Yeah, you can say that.

**Wow. That's amazing.**

So we've done well. We've done well.

**And your son must have felt really good when you finally got involved.**

And guess what he's doing now?

**What?**

Once he got me started in this, being a young person and very ambitious, now he's in the pharmaceutical business.

**Doing what?**

He goes to India to set up deals with pharmacies or manufacturers and sells the middleman to pharmacy. He's making -- this is pittance to him.

**Oh, that's fantastic.**

Yeah. He's making a lot of money. Thank God I invested in that. So I'm getting a little piece from him. This business will never grow as fast as the pharmaceutical business.

**Oh, yes.**

We deal with small margins. So if I tell you we're making \$85 million gross, it evens out at the end of the year maybe ten million or it could be less than ten mil. But it's a good business. And we love it. We do a lot of good for people. When -- I sent you some pictures --

**Katrina.**

When Katrina hit the Katrina victims -- we're always doing something with the community. We can't do everything. We can't spend all our profits. But I try to do a lot of stuff for kids. The golf

tournaments we get in. That golf tournament was for a bunch of kids. And we were the bronze sponsor in that. I think we might have spent five grand or something. But we do that a lot, a lot. The philanthropic part of Shetakis is greater than those multibillion-dollar competitors. We do a lot in the community.

**Good. Now, how did Wright Foods come out of this?**

Okay. Wright Foods was put together as an entity to buy the majority share of Shetakis. Wright Foods evolved into our own company to go outside of the state of Nevada. Remember I told you there's mandate when gaming proliferated into New Orleans and Detroit and they ran into black mayors and all of these people. They had sense enough to tell these people we're going to mandate this by law that you do so much business. So they have to. I saw a niche. I tried to tell my partners let's go invest it over here. We can grow faster. So I did it on my own. I invested. And I now started Wright Foods although I'm a partner here. My office hasn't changed since I was the chairman and CEO. I'm still here and I've got a partnership that Wright Foods can also grow in Las Vegas.

When I first divested I could not. I could only do Wright Foods outside of the state of Nevada. But I don't want to go into all the other stuff. But now I'm doing stuff here, too. I will be calling this guy about doing some work over at the Thomas & Mack and all those places. They don't have any minority vendors over there. And neither do they up north. But they're going to hear from me.

**That's good.**

They're going to hear from me.

**Now, tell me about Cuba.**

Okay. My partner -- my brother Peter Guzman is his name. He grew up on the Westside. He was a Mexican -- no. He's a Cuban. He grew up on the Westside. The Westside is predominately a black area. So he knows -- you know, he's got the flavor. He's got range. Anyway, I hired him as a consultant to help me grow this business in the Latino community. Well, from one thing led to another. He became a part owner of Wright Foods. He's the one that gave us the opportunity to go to Cuba because Cuba has \$1.4 billion to spend in food products. They were looking for a minority company, and he was sitting at the right table with a group called the Havana Group.

And they were talking about everybody but minority because the Caribbean Islands was devastated by a series of hurricanes that destroyed their indigenous food. So they needed outside help. Cuba was hoping to get someone of color to come and they got us.

So we went down there November the 1st through the 7th thanks to my brother who is also a partner of mine, and Peter Guzman that got us down there. We flew from Las Vegas to Miami. I was so excited. I get on the plane and before you know it I'm in Cuba because it's only 90 miles away. They took off. I'm in Cuba. But the way that our country treats Cuba it may have been on the moon. We got there so quick and were treated like royalty when we got there. I saw a lot of people that looked like us. That was the slave drop-off.

**Of course, yes.**

And I was talking to a Cuban guy. I speak a little Spanish, but he spoke English. I was complimenting him. I said, you know, a lot of strong people -- you know, I was trying to compliment him -- people that look like me were dropped off here because they couldn't break their spirit. He says that's true that some were dropped off here because they were weak. I said okay. But he says but you're right. There's a lot of very -- and remember when Castro sent those kids over here. Elian --

**Yes.**

He sent like three black kids and two light-skinned kids. So I sent you a picture of me watching election returns with this real short black guy. He was a top official for buying export-import, the one with the beard. He looked like a brother from New York. He's a Cuban, speaks Spanish and stuff. Treated us -- we had no idea that they were going to do this for us. And we were in -- and now we are a provider for food and other substances. We're the only business for trashcan liners, plastic gloves, water, several items. It will be in the millions of dollars. The business is coming out.

And because we went to Cuba, you know, you can name the American companies on one hand. This little black company goes over there, right? That's why I ended up doing a debriefing on Capitol Hill with our majority leader on both sides of the aisle now. I talked to a Republican and -- to let them know to support this Nevada corporation with a very innovative way of growing because we may be able to hire more people. And both sides of the aisle said that they support

Nevada businesses. So I got debriefed and I was telling Harry Reid about this -- I love Harry Reid. You know, I'm kind of -- Danny Tarkanian is running against him. So now I've got to hide. I've got to hide. You know I'm going to vote Democrat.

The reason that I like having Harry Reid there is because of his seniority. I know there are people who are against the seniority system. But he has such power for Nevada. Let me say this. That's like capturing lightning in a bottle. It's never happened in the history of this state. Why would you want -- and I love Danny. I love Danny. Why would you want to take a freshman and put us at the bottom again?

**That's right. And that's exactly the way to go.**

When Nevada needs help -- even if you don't like the man. If you love Nevada you've got to vote for him. Sorry about that.

**So that's why I -- yeah.**

Anybody with any brains would say what you just said. If you love Nevada and you love your kids and you want the future of Nevada to be -- why would you want to replace him and put us at the bottom of the barrel? Everybody laughed at Nevada.

**That's right. So if you wanted some young people to get into this kind of distribution business that you are in now, how would you advise them?**

How would I -- first of all, I would tell them to learn about this business, preferably be mentored by someone like me because there's certain amount of things that books can't tell you. Let me tell you what I did when I first got in this business. I had my son ride in the trucks to deliver, to do all kinds of stuff and report back to me. You understand? I couldn't do it because I was -- I just couldn't do it. But we learned this business. Always know your business from the very bottom to the top. Don't have any gray area because people can hold you for ransom like that because, now, you can't get rid of anybody because, you know, sometimes if you -- I have a friend of mine named Harold Lewis. He's a mentor of mine. Google him, Harold R. Lewis. Harold R. Lewis, he's a multimillionaire. And he owns several McDonalds and he's the chairman of the Trumpet Awards.

**Oh, okay.**

He can get on the phone and talk to Oprah. Golfs with Stedman. He lives here in Vegas. And

he's my mentor. You know what he told me? And I had him to speak over at the Urban Chamber. He says, Lonnie, if I can't flip the burger, if I can't work this, I can't do that, I can't do the fries, what good am I? He says nobody is going to tell me how to run my business. I know it from inside out. That's when I started really, really getting into this. So, no, you've got to know your business. You've got to learn about it and do the historical part, but then you need to get your hands dirty. That's how you learn this business. You don't learn any business through osmosis. You've got to go -- like the hotel business, I'm considered an expert. That's why I they hired me in Detroit.

**Right.**

When there are gaming scams -- I don't know if I sent you anything on that.

**I don't think so.**

The federal government will come to me to be an expert witness in court. I think I sent you something like that. I may have. Take a look at it. It's from the federal government. I'm one of the guys that the federal government will come and get to be a witness in court. So I know front of the house, the back of the house, the casino, the whole ball of wax.

**That is fantastic.**

So you've got to know your business. I've been a casino porter, a porter. I washed dishes. I've done everything but be a cocktail waitress. I got the legs for it. They wouldn't hire me because I don't look good enough. But the bottom line is I've done it all -- front desk, assistant hotel manager. I've done it all -- security guard, surveillance. I've done it all.

**Wow. I read something in the information you sent me about UniPro FoodService, Incorporated. Now tell me how that works and what that is.**

UniPro is a company that companies like me buy from. Yeah. They're companies that have access to farms and slaughterhouses. Those are huge companies that we as wholesalers buy from them.

**Okay. I see.**

Now, it would be great for me to be UniPro and to have this. Maybe one day. I don't know. But that's UniPro.

**So that's what UniPro is. So tell me right now what is the future of Wright Foods.**

Wright Foods has a strategic plan to, number one, I want to be able to get some federal contracts. There are no black companies -- I want to be able to feed the armed services over in Germany, over in Korea, over in Iraq. I mean Halliburton can't have it all. How about a minority business doing something like that? I want to be able to feed where they got all of our people locked up in these penal institutions. Those are huge contracts. That's the federal side.

Now, the domestic side, me and my -- and I'll send you some information -- my Latino partner, we want -- in our communities it's usually we have mom and pop stores in there. And a lot of them are run by different ethnic groups, sometimes the Koreans, sometimes this ethnic group, sometimes blacks. Well, because they don't have the economies of scale to buy, we don't get the fresh fruit. We get the wilted lettuce. We don't get the good food. We want to change that. Now, that might be ten years down the road. But we also -- our first niche is to do business with people we already do business with that know us, the hotel-casino business. That's why I'm going to -- I got the deals in Louisiana. Then I'm going to go to Detroit. And then after we get so much business, we're going to become a publicly traded company. And then those other things may happen where we can start feeding this emerging community of Latinos and African-Americans and feed them well and have Wright Foods in the supermarkets even if we own them. That's what we want. That's what we want to do.

So we're talking about a multibillion-dollar corporation if nobody comes and wants to buy us out. And we may not sell. We may not sell because the bottom line is -- you know, one of our first billionaires, Bob Johnson, when I owned Urban American Television Network I hired some of the people that came from Bob Johnson. It's all about money. A publicly traded company is all about adding the value to the stock. And I'm not going to do any and everything to do that. That's all I've got to say.

**Okay, good. Well, I appreciate everything that you've talked about today. This is amazing. So are there any final remarks that you'd like to make about anything that you've kind of thought of along the way and didn't get to say?**

All I can tell you is I wish -- I've always looked at education as being the antidote to the social ills impacting our communities, our world, the nation. I just wish that this younger generation realized that the highest place on this Earth is not in the Sears Tower. It's not at the top of Trump

Tower. But the way that our ancestors made it, the highest place is on your knees at the foot of the cross. If we can ever get that across to this generation that has been ripped off with this material thought in their mind -- it's okay to be in business. But don't let the tail wag the dog. Don't ever trade money for your eternal life.

**Oh, yes.**

A lot of our kids are doing that. And I know it's a spiritual thing, to turn that spiritual battle around on an adversary. And the adversary is not the white man. It's spiritual being that works towards the people, like God works through us. They will work through other people. And if our kids can know that the greatest -- the greater that is in you is in this world. And no weapons formed against you will prosper in (indiscernible) conquerors. So if we can just get our kids back to how our ancestors have come to all of this hate crimes and all this stuff and to get the first black man in the White House and not only just have a black man there but have the most qualified President and First Lady in the history of this nation.

**That's right.**

So I just want our kids to be educated spiritually. And all the rest of it will come naturally.

**I agree.**

If I ever get to a point like you say you're going to get to where you can have your money working for you instead of you working for money and then you can go out and do the things that God will have you to do -- you still can do that, but you can do it even more if you're independently wealthy. But we as older African-Americans that have been on the rough side of the mountain, we have to have enough patience to be able to -- that's another reason why I liked teaching at the college. Those kids know there's something different about me. And I can't talk about the Lord in front of the classroom. But when they come see me at the office hours, they'll come in my office, oh, you're a Christian? Yeah, I'm a Christian.

**Yes. Yes.**

But anyway, that's what my whole thing is to try and do something to make a difference. We got those black kids in to deal and to have disposable income. We tried to feed the homeless. We tried to march when we had to march. Tried to hold office at NAACP. We tried to do things to make a difference to be a person of value, not a rich person, but a person that can enrich other



people. There's a lot of rich people, but there's very few people of value.

Jim Rogers used to be a person of value that to me now is just a rich guy. And I could be wrong. I don't spend a lot of time with him now because he was around when these people came after me and didn't do anything.

**Yeah. It appears that he has changed.**

Yeah. And it saddens me because he was one of the guys that helped so many people get educated, black people. I've had conversations with him, he had love in his heart. And I see him now and it's just not -- it saddens me. And then I went to Jim and I told him about these people. It was at a Rebel basketball game. He said they're not going to bother you, Lonnie. I said, but, Jim, I said, these guys are racist. He said I know they're bigots. I said, Jim, you're the chancellor. You know they're bigots and you're not going to do anything about it? He said don't worry. After that conversation these boys came at me harder. So I don't know what happened.

**But we know that the end -- yeah.**

God didn't allow it. See, if God is for you, no man or no system will be against you. God has proven to me don't put your faith and trust in Neil Smythe as baccarat dealer. Don't put your faith and trust in Jim Rogers. Don't put your faith and trust in man. Put your faith and trust in me. And God tells us don't worry. You know, there's a whole chapter on worry, a whole chapter on being more than conquerors, how no weapons formed against us. So that's it.

**Wonderful. Thank you so much.**

All right. My pleasure.

Abernathy, Reverend, 18  
 audition, 11  
  
 Baldwin, Bobby, 45, 46, 47, 49  
 Basketball Alumni Association, 20, 29, 42  
 Bayer, John, 18  
 Bellagio, 41, 43, 46  
 Binion, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 19  
 Binion, Benny, 9, 11  
 Bishop, Ike, 23  
 Black Panther party, 17  
 Black, Randy, 41  
 Box, Richard, 42  
  
 Caesars, 9, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 33, 34, 37, 41  
 Cigars of the World, 29  
 CSN, 23, 38, 39, 40, 43, 45, 47, 49, 50  
  
 Dell, Ron, 42  
 Duncan, Ruby, 16, 18  
  
 Far East, 33  
 Fonda, Jane, 18  
  
 Gay, Jimmy, 31  
 Genesis, 48  
 Green, Sidney, 24  
 Guiliomino, Don, 33  
 Guzman, Peter, 54  
  
 Hess, Mayor, 1  
 Horseshoe, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 45  
 Hospitality Institute, 38, 45  
 Hospitality International, 44  
 Howard, Bucky, 13  
  
 Jim Crow, 4, 8, 16  
 Johnson, Magic, 22  
 Jordan, Michael, 22  
  
 Knight, Gladys, 26  
  
 Leavitt Insurance, 22  
  
 Leonard, Sugar Ray, 24  
 Lewis, Harold R., 56  
 Lewis, Jerry, 24  
 Lynch, Willie, 4, 5, 16  
  
 Native American casinos, 7, 44  
 NBA, 22, 33  
 Newton, Wayne, 24  
  
 O'Callaghan, Governor, 22  
  
 Reid, Harry, 55  
 Riviera Hotel, 15, 19, 24, 25  
 Rogers, Jim, 21, 22, 23, 59, 60  
 Rogich, Sig, 22, 29  
 Rose, Benny, 9, 10  
  
 Sahara Hotel, 9, 19  
 Sands, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32  
 scholarships, 8, 20  
 Shetakis Wholesalers, 47, 51, 52  
 Shetakis, Jim, 51  
 Smythe, Neil, 27  
 Stop Drugs, 42  
 Sullivan, Dr., 45, 46  
  
 Tarkanian, Jerry, 15, 23, 24, 31, 35, 42, 55  
 Theus, Reggie, 23  
  
 Uncle "Gold Dollar", 9, 10, 11, 13, 47  
 UniPro FoodService, 57  
 Urban American TV Network, 30  
  
 Vallen, Dean Jimmy, 32  
 Von Tobel family, 1  
  
 Walsh, Pat, 41  
 Walton, Bill, 23, 25  
 Watkins, Tommy, 20  
 Watts Riot, 16  
 Weinberger, Billy, 24, 25  
 Westside, 6  
 Woodbury, Bruce, 1, 21  
 Woodbury, Claire, 1

Wright Foods, 47, 50, 53, 54, 57, 58  
Wright, Jr., Ernest, 2  
Wright, Larry, 2  
Wynn, Elaine, 9, 32  
Wynn, Steve, 23, 31, 41, 45, 46

## Appendix

Stop Drugs, Las Vegas Sun photo clipping, 1987

Regents Review, March 2007

Business Press, July 7, 2008

Minority Business News, 2009

Letter from John C. Lambrose, Law Offices of the Federal Public Defender, Aug. 1998

Letter from Lt. Gary B. Christian, Detroit Police Department, August 1998

Letter from Bellagio, August 1999

Letter from MGM/Mirage, November 2000

Letter from United States Dept. of Education, February 2002

Letter from Randy Black, owner Casa Blanca and Virgin River, September 2002

Letter from Jackie Crawford, Dept. of Corrections, December 2002

Letter from Gov. Kenny Guinn, January 2003

Letter from Kangwon Land, Inc., June 2001

Letter from UNLV, admission to Educational Leadership program, 2009

Shetakis Wholesalers, business plan 2010



**BASKETBALL ARTISTRY** — Sacramento Kings guard and former UNLV Reggie Theus (second from left) is presented with a painting by Las Vegas artist John Pacheco at a recent Kings-Detroit Pistons game. Joining Theus are (left to right) Carl Piazza, an advisor for the UNLV Basketball Alumni Association; Pistons forward and ex-Rebels star Sidney Green; Sacramento Kings guard and former UNLV guard Gary

Alumni Association. Lonnie Wright helped current UNLV guard Gary Graham design the "Stop Drugs" shirts, which are on sale at the UNLV campus bookstore and Flakey Jake's on Maryland Pkwy. Wright and Box also announced that the UNLV alumni team, with Theus and Green, will play the Georgetown alumni, with Patrick Ewing, and the North Carolina State alumni, with Michael Jordan, at the Thomas and Mack Center in July.

# UNLV Basketball Alumni: Continuing the Tradition

College basketball culminates this month with March Madness as teams from across the country compete to capture the national title. With UNLV taking that title in 1990 and UNR making three trips to the NCAA Tournament, Nevada has had a strong showing in basketball. Yet what happens to star players once the game is over? That was a question Lonnie Wright, a former UNLV basketball player, was forced to examine one night in 1976.

Wright was attending a Runnin' Rebels basketball game at the Las Vegas Convention Center (the Thomas & Mack Center wasn't built until 1983), and noticed a disheveled looking man angrily knocking on the convention center door. As Wright walked closer, he vaguely recognized the unkempt man as someone he had once looked up to, a mentor and former Rebel basketball player who had inspired Wright to attend UNLV and play basketball. A conversation followed, and Wright learned that his former role model had not completed his degree nor had he gone on to the pros. He was now unemployed and angry at UNLV for what he considered "using him up and throwing him away."

"Back then, the NCAA didn't allow players five years to get their degree," said Wright. "And this man was now very bitter – angry at himself for not finishing school and angry at UNLV for not helping him to do so."

Wright, who is now the hospitality specialist for workforce and economic development at CCSN, felt that something needed to be done to help give former UNLV basketball players a second chance. He came up with the idea to raise money through alumni basketball games, using the funds to help former athletes return to UNLV to complete their degree. In 1977, Wright pitched the idea to local attorney and Rebel Athletic Booster Jim Rogers (now NSHE chancellor), who Wright says "jumped at the idea to help." Rogers donated \$25,000 to get the program started and the UNLV Runnin' Rebel Basketball Alumni Association was born.

"I was happy to help get the program going because it was just the right thing to do," said Rogers. "These athletes had played for UNLV for years and had done so much for the school. This was a great way to say, 'We appreciate what you've done and we want you to continue to be part of our community.'"



*(Left to Right) Reggie Theus, Coach Jim Rogers, and Lonnie Wright converse at halftime of the 1988 UNLV Runnin' Rebel Basketball Alumni game against the Georgetown Alumni team.*

Rogers recalls that NBA great Reggie Theus, who played for UNLV three years before turning pro in 1978, came back for every one of the alumni games. "Reggie is a first-class individual and was a great asset to our team," said Rogers. "All of the alumni players were just exceptional people. We beat some really good teams and I've never had so much fun in my life."

Rogers and Wright recall that back then, there wasn't as much to do in Las Vegas so there was immediate excitement about the games.

"Our first big game was against UCLA in 1978," recalls Wright. "It was like David versus Goliath – UCLA had seven current NBA players and eight All Americans and no one expected us to win."

But win they did. The UNLV alumni team beat the UCLA alumni 156-134 at the convention center in front of a packed house. Wright recalls that Rogers, who had originally agreed to temporarily serve as the team's coach, turned out to be an incredible leader and stayed in that role for the next 13 years.

"Jim is a great tactician. He took the game seriously, did his fact-finding, and prepared himself well," said Wright. "Before the big UCLA game, Jim was nervous as a cat, but we won, and he did such a great job we asked him to stay on permanently."

Wright recalls that for a few of the games, the opposing teams even brought out their professional coaches, including the great Bill Walton and Larry Brown, and the opposing players included such NBA greats as Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan and Patrick Ewing. With so many NBA players involved, every game had to be sanctioned by the NBA and was required to use NBA referees.

From 1977 to 1990, the UNLV alumni team garnered win after win against top alumni teams from all over the country and raised more than \$3 million in scholarship money. The fundraising was so successful that in the early 1980s they began offering scholarships to all former UNLV athletes, no matter what the sport, and further expanded to cover advanced degrees. Many former athletes took advantage of the expanded program including Wright himself, who went back to earn a Master's degree in post secondary/secondary education in 1982.

Wright notes that not only was the UNLV program one of the first in the country to send athletes back to school, it also supported the effort to encourage the NCAA to give athletes a fifth year to earn their degree. The program also offered free basketball clinics to underprivileged youth in Las Vegas.

"We did everything we could to give back to the community and to spread the good word about UNLV wherever we went," said Wright. "I believe that was as important as anything else — we helped the nation to see UNLV in a positive light."

The program even spread its goodwill overseas when Caesars Palace sponsored the team to travel to the Far East in the late 1980s. Wright recalls playing and often beating the national teams of Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Korea.

The success of the UNLV Basketball Alumni Association from 1977 to 1990 paralleled that of the UNLV Runnin' Rebels men's basketball program. The program emerged as a powerhouse in the late 70s, 80s and early 90s while it was led by Coach Jerry Tarkanian.

"Coach Tark supported the basketball alumni association 100 percent, but sadly enough the organization disbanded in 1990," said Wright.

Although the successful alumni program came to an end, its contributions were not forgotten. In March 2004, a ceremony was held during halftime at a UNLV men's basketball game at the Thomas & Mack, and a banner was raised in honor of Lonnie Wright and the UNLV Runnin' Rebel Basketball Alumni Association.

One member of the Far East traveling team was Leon Symanski, a member of the UNLV basketball team from 1984-1987. In 2004, Symanski became the moving force behind a revival of the basketball alumni program called the UNLV Legends, which was founded shortly after the university hired NBA coach Lon Kruger. Symanski, now a successful attorney, has attempted to coordinate a resurgence of the UNLV Men's Basketball Alumni Association for several years, but had no luck until Coach Kruger took over the UNLV basketball program.

"Coach Kruger has embraced the former Rebels with open arms and has had a fantastic attitude about the history and importance of UNLV basketball in our community," said Symanski. "I believe with his support we will be able to bridge the gap that has existed for so long, and make this a positive for the basketball alumni and the athletic department as a whole."

Kruger and Symanski, along with a dedicated group of faithful, hardworking members of the Rebel community, were



(Left to Right) Freddie Banks, Coach Jerry Tarkanian, and Reggie Manuel at the UNLV Legends Alumni game held November 2006.

Photo Courtesy of UNLV Athletic Department

able to organize the first Runnin' Rebels Basketball Legends and Friends Classic held last November. The event included a golf tournament fundraiser and a UNLV Alumni game played prior to the UNLV game against Dixie State. A reception was held the night before to honor Greg Anthony, the point guard for UNLV's 1990 national championship team, who had his No. 50 jersey retired at halftime the next night. The two-day event raised nearly \$20,000 which was given directly to the UNLV men's basketball department.

"I'm just thrilled to see these players coming forward to get involved and being so interested in doing what they can to support UNLV athletics and the community," said Kruger.

Many former UNLV players have gone on to have exceptional professional basketball careers including Anthony, Larry Johnson, Shawn Marion, Marcus Banks, Armon Gilliam and Stacey Augmon, just to name a few. However, many have stayed in the community such as Symanski, who was a member of the Boyd School of Law's first class and began practicing law in Las Vegas shortly thereafter. Yet, no matter what their circumstances, Symanski says the alumni are excited to get back together to support UNLV athletics and to have a positive visibility in the community.

Symanski says plans for the future of the UNLV Legends include working toward becoming a formal alumni association, continuing the yearly golf tournament and alumni games, and expanding community service to benefit the city's youth.

"We would really like to get out into the community to talk to kids about doing the right thing, working hard, and staying in school," said Symanski. "The kids really look up to basketball greats, past and present, and I think this group of concerned and dedicated former players can really make a difference."

Coach Kruger couldn't agree more and says he sees great things on the horizon. "The relationship of UNLV basketball to the Las Vegas community has been closely tied over the years and it is so exciting to see that happening again," he said.

## COVER STORY

**"There are segments of society that render me at a disadvantage just because of the way I look. It doesn't happen all the time, but sometimes. African-American males have been somewhat of a poster child for ill will in our society. So when you're out there, even if you're educated, you still run up against people being a product of their environment."**

Lonnie Wright | CHAIRMAN AND CEO, SHETAKIS WHOLESALERS

"There are segments of society that render me at a disadvantage just because of the way I look," said Lonnie Wright, the black owner of Shetakis Wholesalers, a food distributor that posts more than \$70 million a year in sales serving local hotel-casinos and the Clark County School District. "It doesn't happen all the time, but sometimes. African-American males have been somewhat of a poster child for ill will in our society. So when you're out there, even if you're educated, you still run up against people being a product of their environment. But you need to learn to navigate past that, and you have to develop tolerance so you don't have a chip on your shoulder. Excuses will not cause you to be successful."

And those major corporate diversity initiatives don't always pay dividends for smaller minority enterprises, added Cedric Crear, president of Crear Creative Group and a member of the Board of Regents for the Nevada System of Higher Education. That's because many companies with diversity programs often fulfill contract objectives by giving one or two larger minority operations big contracts, frequently in construction.

"If you dive down into it, is it one minority-owned company getting a \$4 million contract or 10 different companies getting pieces of a bigger \$4 million contract?" Crear said. "It's a quicker, larger chunk that can be bitten off at one time. It's easy to say, 'Hey, we gave out \$50 million in contracts,' but it was for three construction companies. There are other companies besides construction."

Minority entrepreneurs also have "huge challenges" in networking, and in grappling with the "unfounded perception" that they



Lonnie Wright, chairman and CEO of Shetakis Wholesalers, stands in his warehouse June 6.

can't provide the services bigger businesses seek, Crear added.

Jefferson agreed that minorities struggle with networking and access to major local corporations.

"It's about the circles you travel in," she said. "Minorities aren't always traveling in the same circles as nonminorities, so we have less exposure to bigger companies. In this town, it's about who you know, not what you know. If you know the right people in the right circles, you have access to people who make decisions. If you're not in those circles, you don't have access. You're out there pounding the pavement and knocking

on doors."

To succeed despite hurdles, Crear recommended that minorities considering launching a business work toward solid credit histories to help secure financing. They should also be willing to put their own money into their startup. He urged entrepreneur hopefuls to stay positive and keep trying: When one bank Crear had connections with turned down his application for an SBA loan, he took his business plan to a second lender who guided him through the process and loaned the funds.

Jefferson suggested looking outside

traditional banks for business loans. She found her financing through the Nevada Microenterprise Initiative, a program that helps small startups launch. The group's \$10,000 loan to Jefferson made the opening of her practice possible.

Minority business owners must make sure they don't give bigger companies an excuse to avoid working with them, Crear said. His business, for example, is licensed to operate in states including New Jersey, Arizona and North Carolina, so no prospective client could deny him a contract based on limited market reach.

Jefferson also recommended minority hopefuls finding a mentor who successfully started his own company, and tap him for advice on getting going.

Observers said they have high hopes for the future of minority business ownership.

The younger generation "is not being indoctrinated and programmed with the types of prejudices and stereotypes my (baby boom) generation grew up with," Wright noted.

Also, Lin said, young minorities have a distinct advantage their more-seasoned counterparts sometimes lack: technological savvy. That enables them to use computers and the Internet to conduct more advanced research, develop extensive business plans and tap into greater resources for financing and networking.

Regardless of minority status, though, the secret to doing well is still the same for any business, Gomez said: "Like any type of reward, success comes from education and vision, plus hard work, hard work and hard work."

Contact reporter Jennifer Robison at [jrobison@reviewjournal.com](mailto:jrobison@reviewjournal.com) or 702-380-4512.





## In This Issue

- Town Hall Meeting with Mayor Oscar Goodman
- NvMSDC Participate in NAMC Conference
- The Declaration of Independence: Did you Know?
- A Minority Small Business Champion Among Us
- The First Monthly MBEIC Mixer
- Amazon Masonry Inc. is Making News!!!
- NvMSDC New Members Class
- Obama: Stimulus is on Track
- The Recovery Act and the State of Nevada
- The Launching of Wright Food and Distribution LLC
- And More.....



## Town Hall Meeting with Mayor Oscar Goodman

Las Vegas, N.V.....**This is the Only Chance!!!!** Nevada Minority Supplier Development Council (NvMSDC) is pleased to announce that the "Happiest Mayor on Earth" is the featured keynote speaker for the next Luncheon being held at the Gold Coast Hotel on Wednesday July 8, 2009. Know first hand, the State of the City plans. The

Mayor will share his plan in terms of the New Projects & Facilities for the downtown area and how MBE's can be involved in the bid opportunities. If you are interested in doing business with the City of Las Vegas, this Town Hall Meeting will be your only chance to make that happen. **Don't miss this opportunity!!!** We expect a full house, so make your reservation no later than Friday, July 3, 2009 by calling 702-894-4477 or send us an e-mail to: nvminority@aol.com.

## NvMSDC Participate in NAMC Conference

On June 18, 2009 The National Association of Minority Contractors celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference Exhibition Fair in Las Vegas at The Mirage Event Center. The Nevada Minority Supplier Development Council was one of the more than 20 exhibitors that participated in the event. Our president Dianne Fontes was invited to participate as emcee in a Welcome Breakfast where the topic of the presentation was "An Inconvenient Truth." Many minority contractors came from different states to share and learn with the locals about safety practices at work and new ways to go green with incentives by way of the stimulus package. Also, this year NAMC Hall of Famers welcomed Mr. Robert Brewer, of Southwest Gas Corporation and Chairperson of NvMSDC Board of Directors, to this esteemed group of honorees for his continuous leadership, motivation and support to the National Association of Minority Contractors.



### La Oportunidad Expo 2009

La Oportunidad Business Conference and Consumer Expo, the premier Latin business event in southern Nevada, is ready to kick off. The two-day event start on Friday, August 21 at Las Vegas Hilton Hotel & Casino, with the Business Conference: covering relevant topics of interest to working professionals and business owners. The Consumer Expo, where members, exhibitors and general public are welcome, is going to take place Saturday, August 22, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Enjoy great music, entertainment, food and fun-filled activities throughout the day!!! Entrance and parking to the Expo is free.

### Congratulations Perini!!!

For fourth time in a row Perini Building Company has been named Top Contractor of Year in the Southwest region according to McGraw-Hill. But the good news does not end there, after completing 67 major Nevada Construction projects; they decide to build something for their own. Visit their new building, located at 181 E. Warms Spring Road, Las Vegas, Nevada 89119.

## The Launching of Wright Foods and Distribution LLC



Lonnie G. Wright Chairman/CEO of Wright Foods and Distribution a family owned, African American company, and his partner and son, Saron Wright have had years of experience working together on several successful business endeavors. The successful duo, owned the majority shares of Urban American Television Network, one of the first African American, publicly traded, television networks in broadcast history. When the Wrights

sold their majority shares in the network, the network was boasting 22 million viewers and 58 affiliates, in the southern states and eastern seaboard. The Wright Family has had two goals in their business endeavors, to deliver quality products and service to their customers, and to give back to the community especially to the disenfranchised. The philanthropic endeavors include the feeding of Katrina victims housed in Las Vegas, Nevada, educational scholarships for minorities, and the extensive work with inner-city minority youth.

Wright Foods and Distribution LLC divested their majority shares of Shetakis Wholesalers of Las Vegas, Nevada May 31, 2009 to explore opportunities outside of the state of Nevada. Wright Foods and Distribution LLC bought the majority shares of Shetakis Wholesalers in early 2006 when Shetakis was grossing 48 million dollars a year. Under new majority ownership, Wright Foods navigated the company towards new opportunities and clients, rendering Shetakis Wholesalers a new yearly gross at the close of 2008, of 80 million dollars. Lonnie Wright saw the opportunities in other gaming venues as New Orleans and Detroit to potentially grow at a much faster rate presenting a catalyst for a national footprint.

Mr. Peter Guzman a long time consultant of Shetakis Wholesalers friend and business partner with the Wrights became a minority owner of Wright Foods and Distribution LLC, with a new emphasis on the domestic Latino market and several international opportunities.

Mr. Guzman and Lonnie Wright have both been blessed to overcome their environments, with education and hard work. Lonnie G. Wright a tenured professor of Hospitality/Hotel Management in the University/college system in the state of Nevada for nearly twenty years, taught at UNLV and CSN. The Wrights, Lonnie and Saron along with their consultant, partner and friend, Peter Guzman, will work tirelessly to service each client with a customized partnership, achieving an optimum fit.

Recently the Wrights, Saron and his father Lonnie went with a delegation arranged by partner Peter Guzman, to the island of Cuba for a food show. The delegation was invited to Cuba to show food products that the government would potentially buy from Wright Foods and Distribution LLC, hence several islands in the Caribbean, including Cuba was devastated by a series of unfortunate hurricanes, that destroyed local island crops.

Wright Foods and Distribution LLC with its new partners embark on opportunities internationally and domestically, utilizing the same work ethic, product delivery, and attention to customer needs, that helped Shetakis Wholesalers grow during Lonnie Wright's tenure as CEO/Chairman of the Board.

*Law Offices of the Federal Public Defender*

*330 S. Third Street, Suite 700*

*Las Vegas, Nevada 89101*

*Tel: 702-388-6577*

*Fax: 702-388-6261*

*Franny A. Forsman  
Federal Public Defender  
District of Nevada*

*John C. Lambrose  
Chief, Appellate/Habeas Division  
Rene L. Valladares  
Chief, Trial Division  
Michael Pescetta  
Chief, Capital Habeas Division*

August 31, 1998

Lonnie Wright, M.S.  
Department Chair  
Department of Resorts/Gaming  
Community College of Southern Nevada  
3200 East Cheyenne Ave.-Z1A  
North Las Vegas, NV 89030-4296

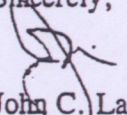
Dear Lonnie:

Please accept my sincere thanks on behalf of myself and my client Mr. Hung Ly for your efforts in the sentencing in his case. Your expertise and input were instrumental in getting the eight month reduction in Mr. Ly's sentence.

Because of your knowledge of gaming and your willingness to help formulate a realistic and convincing counter attack to the government's "special skill's" enhancement the Judge was left with no choice but to reverse his earlier imposition of the two level enhancement.

Again, thank you for your professional help in this matter. I will certainly keep you in mind for any other cases involving gaming.

Sincerely,

  
John C. Lambrose  
Asst. Federal Public Defender

JCL:pmr

CC: Dr. Moore  
Cheyenne Campus

CITY OF DETROIT  
DEPARTMENT OF POLICE

---

August 5, 1998

Lonnie G. Wright  
Department Chair  
Community College of Southern Nevada  
3200 East Cheyenne Avenue  
North Las Vegas, Nevada 89030-4296

Dear Mr. Wright:

The Detroit Police Department would like to extend our appreciation for your participation in our First Annual Tourist Safety and Hospitality Seminar held on July 13 and 14, 1998, at the Crowne Plaza Pontchartrain.

Your input provided the participants with insightful information regarding "Redefining Hospitality - It is Everybody's Responsibility". Because of your expertise, experience, and vast knowledge, our First Tourist Safety and Hospitality Seminar was a great success.

Once again, please accept our most sincere thanks for your efforts. We look forward to a continued alliance towards future endeavors.

*Gary B. Christian*  
GARY B. CHRISTIAN  
Lieutenant L-11  
Commanding Officer  
Gaming Administration Unit

GBC/sbb

# BELLAGIO

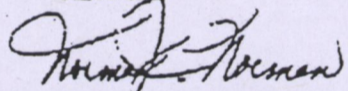
August 11, 1999

To Whom It May Concern:

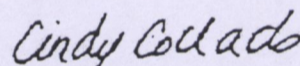
Lornie Wright, Professor at the Community College of Southern Nevada, was helpful in assisting our corporation with the recruitment and training of over 150 individuals from the Las Vegas community who were hired as dealers in the Table Games Department prior to the opening of Bellagio in October, 1998.

This program has been successful, due largely to the cooperative efforts of the company and Professor Wright. Professor Wright assisted in the selection of final candidates and worked directly with the training of dealers enrolled in the program. The attrition rate of program participants, to date, is less than 5%.

Sincerely



Norma J. Norman, JD  
Employee Relations Manager



Cindy Collado  
Training Manager

COPY SENT VIA FACIMILE  
ORIGINAL SENT VIA U.S. MAIL

# MGM MIRAGE

---

November 6, 2000

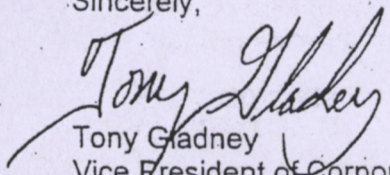
Lonnie Wright  
Associate Vice President  
Community College of Southern Nevada Hospitality Institute  
3200 E. Cheyenne Avenue  
North Las Vegas, Nevada 89030-4296

Dear Lonnie,

The Race and Culturalnomics presentation that took place at MGM Grand Hotel/Casino was well received by Supervisors and Managers from our various properties. MGM MIRAGE is committed to fostering an environment that promotes diversity, mutual respect, flexibility and individuals creativity. The Race and Culturalnomics presentation definitely contributes to this commitment.

We look forward to working with the Hospitality Institute of CCSN in the future.

Sincerely,

  
Tony Gladney  
Vice President of Corporate Diversity  
MGM MIRAGE

TG:ib

3260 SOUTH INDUSTRIAL ROAD LAS VEGAS, NEVADA 89109  
702.650.7400 fax 702.650.7401



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY

FEB 8 2002

Professor Lonnie Wright  
Associate Vice President  
Community College of Southern Nevada

Dear Professor Wright:

We understand that the Community College of Southern Nevada has been interested in promoting a "sister city" relationship with Qing Hai Province. As you may know, the U.S. Department of Education recognizes the importance of educating students about people and nations throughout the world. We believe strongly that international exchanges and student exchanges are vital in preparing our citizens to live in a diverse and tolerant society and to succeed in a global economy.

The events surrounding the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> underscore the fact that knowledge about the cultures and languages of our neighbors throughout the world is becoming increasingly important in the daily lives of all Americans. For the past two years, the Departments of State and Education have joined hands in commemorating International Education Week. During the Week, we celebrate and highlight the importance of teaching international education skills in our schools. I hope you will take a look at our joint web site <[exchanges.state.gov/iew2001/](http://exchanges.state.gov/iew2001/)> to see the various kinds of activities in which we engaged this year. Secretary Paige sent out letters to all school principals as well as State Governors to enlist their participation in this event. For your information, I am enclosing copies of the letters along with a bookmark announcing International Education Week.

Thank you for your interest and effort in international education. I wish you much success in your endeavors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lenore Y. Garcia".

Lenore Y. Garcia  
Director  
International Affairs Division

400 MARYLAND AVE., S.W. WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

*Our mission is to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence throughout the Nation.*



September 20, 2002

To whom it may concern:

Eighteen months ago we began a working relationship with the Community College of Southern Nevada, specifically Professor Lonnie Wright and the Hospitality Institute. I asked Professor Wright to help us determine what training strategies could be employed to help us improve our enterprise. Professor Wright assembled a team of professionals to evaluate our operations and came up with some suggestions.

The Professor, his assistant, Mr. Hawkins, and his team developed a customized training curriculum to address the educational, developmental and assessment needs at our 3 properties; CasaBlanca, Oasis and Virgin River in Mesquite, Nevada. As a result of this training program, we have noted a marked improvement in our overall attitude, service and the working environment within our operations.

Customer Service and Employee Relations classes were developed from Professor Wright's research to expose personal prejudices, promote sensitivity, foster teamwork and camaraderie among our workforce.

The managers and supervisors were taught seven classes on Customer Service (How we treat our guests) and Employee Relations (How we treat our co-workers). Our training through the Community College of Southern Nevada is the cornerstone in our efforts to focus on service, promote harmony in our work force and redefine hospitality. In addition to specialized training the university also provides vocational Spanish and English classes to our employees.

We believe we have become more efficient, more effective and more cohesive in our operations by utilizing the classes and training provided by the Hospitality Institute. In order to continually readdress our program on an annual basis, the Community College conducts a survey to benchmark the employee's feelings on priorities in the work place. We then try to adjust the company to make changes in that regard. On an annual basis the Hospitality Institute serves as a facilitator at our management retreats to continually update and hone our management skills and our training philosophies.

100 Pioneer Blvd.  
Mesquite, NV 89027  
1-800-346-7724

950 W. Mesquite Blvd.  
Mesquite, NV 89027  
1-800-459-PLAY

897 W. Mesquite Blvd.  
Mesquite, NV 89027  
1-800-21-OASIS



I highly recommend Professor Wright/CCSN and their staff for operation evaluation and training. I am extraordinarily pleased with the value of their services and look on them to help train our way into the ever changing future of the hospitality industry. In my estimation, the availability and level of talent and training at our fingertips at CCSN cannot be duplicated in house.

If you have any questions regarding Professor Wright's program, please feel free to contact me at your convenience.

Respectfully,

Ron Black, Sr.  
Managing Partner  
CasaBlanca/Oasis/Virgin River

RBS/lb

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
KENNY C. GUINE  
GOVERNOR  
FRANKIE SUE DEL PAPA  
ATTORNEY GENERAL  
DEAN BELLER  
SECRETARY OF STATE

STATE OF NEVADA

JACKIE CRAWFORD  
Director



DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

*Leading Nevada Corrections Into the Future*

4070 Silver Sage Drive  
Carson City, NV 89701  
(775) 887-3216  
Fax (775) 887-3381

December 31, 2002

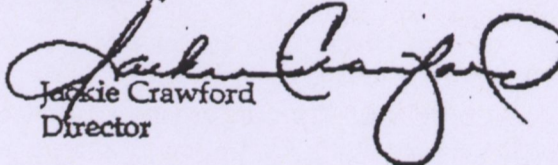
Dear Potential Employers:

The Nevada Department of Corrections asks that you strongly consider graduates of the Community College of Southern Nevada's Hospitality Institute vocational training programs. The Hospitality Institute provides high quality training that prepares people to excel and be an asset in the workplace. In fact, we in the Department of Corrections are so impressed with the work of the Community College that we selected the Hospitality Institute to be our service provider of horticulture and culinary arts training at the High Desert State Prison and Southern Desert Correctional Center.

Our programs at the aforementioned correctional institutions are called the Southern Nevada Inmate Project for Hope ("SNIPH"). SNIPH is designed to transform wards of the state into taxpayers and positive contributors to our community. Because of the Hospitality Institute's track record of previous success with inmates from the women's prison and high regard in the hospitality industry throughout Southern Nevada, the Department of Corrections could not have chosen a better partner in this effort.

However, all the training in the world will not benefit anyone unless there is an opportunity to utilize the skills and knowledge gained. That is where you come into the picture. We need your help to provide people with a legitimate opportunity for gainful employment, so they can improve themselves and their quality of life. Please join us in this effort to help people grow, change and maintain themselves as productive members of society. We thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

  
Jackie Crawford  
Director

JC:td



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

KENNY C. GUINN  
GOVERNOR

January 7, 2003

Professor Lonnie Wright  
The Hospitality Institute of the  
Community College of Southern Nevada  
3200 East Cheyenne Avenue, J1B  
North Las Vegas, NV 89030-4296

Dear Professor Wright:

Thank you so much for the information on the Community College of Southern Nevada's Hospitality Institute vocational programs. I know you are working closely with Director Crawford and are having great success with this program.

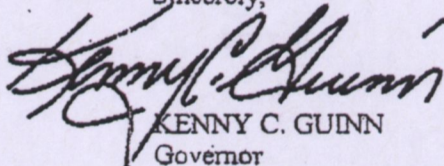
You are offering a tremendous service by providing your participants with meaningful, useful skills that will allow them to be contributing, productive members of our society. We certainly support your efforts to continue this successful program.

We know that a vital component of this process is to find employment for these individuals and we encourage all of our Nevada businesses to assist you in providing opportunities for your participants to utilize their newly gained knowledge and abilities.

We join you in asking our Nevada companies to participate in this effort to provide these individuals with a genuine opportunity for rewarding employment so they can improve themselves and their quality of life. Not only will they be providing them a new outlook on life, they will also be gaining skilled, valuable additions to their business.

Again, congratulations to you on the success of the Community College of Southern Nevada's Hospitality Institute vocational programs and best wishes in finding committed, professional business partners to help continue this outstanding project.

Sincerely,

  
KENNY C. GUINN  
Governor

bac

Kangwon Land  
CASINO · HOTEL

To : Mr. Lonnie Wright(C/O Carl Craven, Jr.)

Fm : Mr. Kang Joon-Sik

Kamsa(Controller General)

Kangwon Land, Inc.

Fax : 011-82-033-590-7530

Dt : June 21, 2001

Dear Mr. Wright

I have been introduced to you by our mutual friend, Mr. Carl Craven Jr. I am the Kamsa(Controller General) of Audit and Inspection Office for the Kangwon Land Casino · Hotel.

For your information, here is a brief information of our company and its structure.

The Kangwon Land, Inc. was established on June 29, 1998 and opened its doors to the Casino & Hotel on October 28, 2000. The majority shareholders are the government(Federal & local) comprising 51% of the stocks.

The casinos are licensed and overseen through the Bureau of Tourism, which is under the Department of the Culture.

Currently, our casino consists of 199 rooms and 10 Blackjacks, 14 Baccarats, 1 Roulette, 1 Tai-Sai, 1 Big Wheel and 480 slot machines, with a total casino staff of 320 people. We will be building our main casino to open in December of 2002 with 472 rooms and 120 total table games and 1,500 slot machines with a total casino staff of 900 people.

Our company structure is as follows:

- ① President-reporting to the shareholders
- ② Kamsa-Checking the overall management reporting to the shareholders
- ③ Managing Dir.-Assisting the President
- ④ Dir-Management reporting to the President
- ⑤ Dir-Operation reporting to the President
- ⑥ Dir-Construction reporting to the President
- ⑦ GM-Hotel reporting to the President
- ⑧ GM-Casino reporting to the President

Duties of our office include all accounts receivables & payable, casino operation, construction, management, personnel and Hotel operation. Although we are part of the company, and our majority shareholders being the government, we have a dual role in acting as the internal audit including the inspection of all matters within the company and an agency of the government to report everything to the Government.

In fact, unlike the function of the President in the private companies, it's divided into two categories between the President and the Kamsa(Controller General) in our half-governmental owned company. The President is to operate the company, whereas the Kamsa is to check the President. By Korean law the Kamsa is entitled to act independently from the President.

Unfortunately our divisions is at its infancy in handling all matters, especially relating to the casino area. We have 12 people on staff, but with little or no experience with the casino and therefore, reaching out to you for some assistance and support in keeping our gaming operation orderly for future development in our society.

Due to our lack of experience we frequently have run-ins with the casino staff(surveillance, casino manager to the president) not reporting all things as it happens, whereas reports may have been altered. Although no one may have committed any cheating or wrong doing, we strongly believe that this opens doors for unlimited possibility of fraudulent incidents, if not already committed, in the

future. In our efforts to prevent any disastrous situations, we're hoping that you could share your experience and knowledge to preserve the integrity of gaming.

We are looking forward to hearing from you with advice on how we should proceed on such matters of our concern in protecting the Government and the shareholders.

Area of concerns:

Surveillance

1. As for camera surveillance over gaming operations in the casino is concerned, this room in our company belongs to the Security Department under Director of Management, that is under the President, who puts restrictions on the men of the Kamsa to have accesses to the room. That's just like setting the wolf to guard the sheep. In our situation, I think the monitoring room(eye-in-the-sky) should be under the control of the Kamsa, rather than to the President. Please let me know your views on this matter.
2. What procedures could be set up for our office to have excess into the surveillance rooms? What supporting regulations or company policies would support or warrant such control?
3. How to enforce all regulations and policy?
4. Disciplinary actions for violating company policy & regulations, (ex: not following procedures, editing tapes, manipulating written reports, etc.)

Your recommendation, assistance and support is requested.

Sincerely,

Joon-Sik Kang



LONNIE WRIGHT  
6320 CROSSWOOD AVENUE  
LAS VEGAS NV 89108

5/6/2009

Dear Lonnie Wright:

Congratulations! On behalf of the Graduate College at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, I am pleased to inform you of your admission to the Educational Leadership (PHD) program for the Fall 2009 semester.

Admission to graduate degree programs at UNLV has become more selective in recent years. There is intense competition for admission; limiting the number of new graduate students enrolled in our programs helps us provide enrolled graduate students with high quality professional mentorship, academic coursework, opportunities to engage in research and creative activity, and professional development programs. Those who earn advanced degrees at UNLV will be well qualified to become leaders in their field and well prepared to face the challenges of tomorrow's world.

Enclosed is a packet of important information that you will need in order to enroll in your graduate program at UNLV, including contact information as well as more general guidelines for the payment of fees and how to register for classes, thereby maintaining your enrollment status as a new graduate student in your program of study. Please read this information carefully and let us know if you have questions.

Please accept my sincerest best wishes for a fulfilling academic experience. We welcome you to our community of scholars.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Sheinkopf", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rob Sheinkopf  
Director of Graduate Admissions & Records  
UNLV Graduate College

Graduate College  
4505 Maryland Parkway • Box 451017  
Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-1017  
Main 702-895-3320 • Fax 702-895-4180

---

## **SHETAKIS WHOLESALERS**

A NEW DIMENSION IN FOODSERVICE DISTRIBUTION

3400 Western Avenue • Las Vegas, Nevada 89109

---

### **6.1 Company History and Overview**

---

#### Overview

When the ownership and management of Shetakis Wholesalers changed in 2000, a new and different distribution alternative was born. We believed then, as we do now, that the Southern Nevada market needed and deserved an independent distribution alternative dedicated to the local market, knowledgeable of the complex needs of our hotel/casino clients, and experienced enough to provide superior service at the lowest possible cost.

Shetakis Wholesalers is that alternative. We are a company that is large enough to service your needs, but with the local autonomy to be flexible and to make decisions quickly. Our senior management team and staff are among the most experienced in the industry. We have focused our purchasing resources towards buying from nationally branded manufacturers that provide the quality and consistency that you need in your food products. We have worked hard to keep distribution costs as low as possible by keeping a lean staff, and using technological solutions to manage our business.

We at Shetakis Wholesalers have a record of innovation and our short history provides some insight into our approach to problem solving. One of our primary goals is to consistently and constantly look for opportunities and challenges that demand solutions.

- In 2002, when our customers told us of major problems with fresh chicken, we developed a program that provides quality, competitive pricing, honest label declarations, and has always focused on food safety and security.
  - In 2003 we developed a strategic alliance with a local cheese converter, and later absorbed that business to become one of the largest cheese purveyors in Southern Nevada.
  - In 2005, in response to a market need for a solid, honest, and proficient minority presence, we actively sought a minority businessman to lead our company. The result was that a majority of our outstanding stock was acquired by Wright Foods, owned by Lonnie Wright, and Shetakis Wholesalers was certified as a Minority Business Enterprise by the Nevada Minority Business Council in May of 2006.
  - In 2007 Shetakis again consolidated two niche distributors in the market, Hans Olsen Egg Company and Ital-Gourmet Las Vegas. These two opportunities create efficiency and provide a strong presence in the fresh shell egg, and Italian Specialty segments.
-



### Company History

Shetakis Wholesalers, originally founded as a family-owned and operated business in the late 1950's, is one of Southern Nevada's first foodservice distributors and has proudly been known for decades as a premier wholesaler of a wide variety of foodservice items. Through the early 1990's Shetakis was a foodservice distribution leader in the Southwest, with distribution branches in Reno, Nevada, and Denver, Colorado.

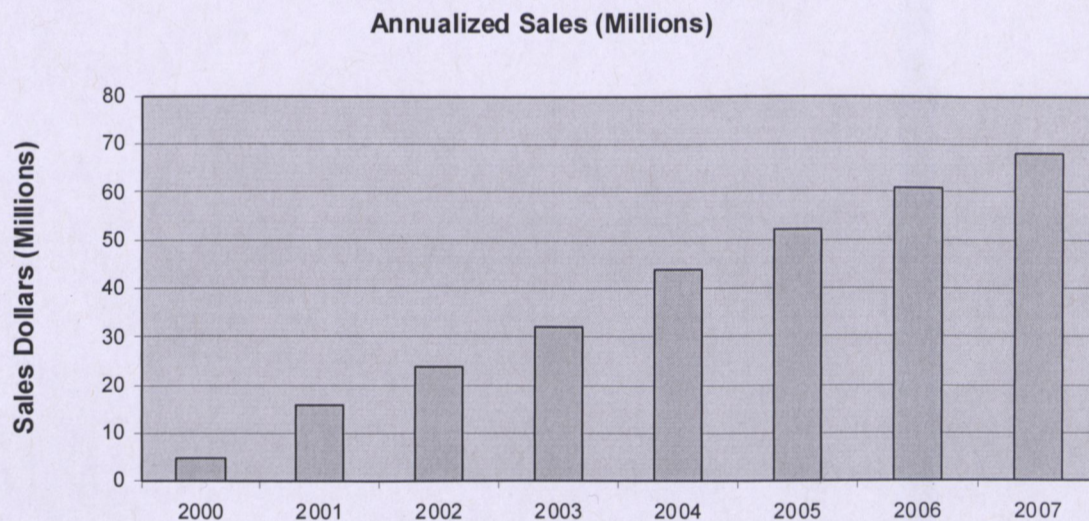
Through the mid-1990's Shetakis lost market-share to two large industry consolidators (Rykoff-Sexton and JP Foodservice – what is now US Foodservice). The business was subsequently sold to two local businessmen in 1999.

In November 2000 Level Source, Inc. purchased the business. Under the guidance of a new and highly seasoned management team, Shetakis Wholesalers returned to record sales levels.

In 2006 Lonnie Wright purchased a majority stake in Shetakis Wholesalers, and we are now a certified Minority Business Enterprise. Our minority status brings another dimension to the market place.

### Annual Sales Volume

Shetakis sales volume is currently annualizing at approximately \$70 million. The following chart shows the dynamic growth of Shetakis' sales since the beginning of 2000.



### Strategic Direction

Strategically, Shetakis Wholesalers is positioned to provide three significant distribution advantages: low cost distribution, high levels of service, and optimum flexibility.

### Products and Vendors

Shetakis Wholesalers stocks a wide range of products to meet your needs in every major category. Two product categories where we are especially strong are fresh chicken and cheese. All products that we sell are unconditionally guaranteed to perform as promised.

#### Customer Experience.

Shetakis Wholesalers services a wide array of customer types. Our business is roughly divided into three segments: Casino/Hotel – 60% of overall volume, Independent Restaurants – 25% of overall volume, and Public/Non-Profit – 15% of overall sales volume.

A representative customer list would include:

- MGM Mirage (11 properties)
- Clark County School District (120 locations)
- Harrah's (7 properties)
- Station Casinos (10 properties)
- Boyd Gaming (7 properties)
- The Venetian/Palazzo
- The Wynn
- Palms and Palms Place
- Planet Hollywood
- Gordon Biersch (2 properties)
- Putters Bar and Grill (8 properties)
- City of Las Vegas
- Clark County School District
- City of Henderson

#### Unipro Foodservice, Inc.

Shetakis is a member of Unipro Foodservice, an organization of over 400 independent distributors with combined purchasing power of over \$35 billion. Through this group we are able to leverage cost of goods, provide quality assurance monitoring, and reduce our overall cost of operation, which translates into competitively priced goods and services.

#### Shetakis Wholesalers – Local Independent with Nationwide Reach

As a member of the Multi-Unit Group (MUG) network, Shetakis has the ability to help provide service to locations throughout the nation.

Formed in 1985, the Multi-Unit Group is a network of progressive locally owned distributors. These distributors are dedicated to serving multi-unit operators with quality products, competitive pricing, consolidated reports, internet order entry and other value-added services. These fundamental characteristics allow the Multi-Unit Group distributors to offer their customers a single source to satisfy all their foodservice needs (including small wares, fresh produce, and paper products). These distributors are some of the largest independents in the nation and exceed over \$4 billion in aggregate sales revenue.

## Operations Employee Overview

Operations Employees			
			Total Years
		Date of Hire	Experience
<b>Delivery Drivers</b>	JB	04/08/02	10 +
	LB	02/19/01	10 +
	JC	04/30/07	10 +
	RG	01/21/05	10 +
	SH	04/28/05	10 +
	OP	11/05/07	5
	JP	02/12/03	10 +
	ER	07/16/07	5
	RR	09/04/07	10 +
	JV	08/21/07	10 +
	AV	04/10/06	10 +
	TZ	05/18/89	10 +
	AW	04/16/08	10 +
<b>Warehouse Personnel</b>	JA	02/26/08	3
	VC	03/03/08	10+
	SC	08/27/04	10+
	PC	09/10/03	10+
	GD	06/09/94	10+
	LD	06/09/94	10+
	RF	10/08/91	10+
	FG	06/02/69	10+
	DG	02/06/03	10+
	CH	12/14/06	3
	KH	12/10/96	10+
	LH	09/10/07	1
	KH	09/19/04	10+
	JK	11/06/06	10+
	MM	04/01/08	2
	JP	12/18/06	10+
	EP	09/27/04	10+
HR	04/15/05	10+	
MS	07/14/06	3	
AS	03/18/02	10+	

## Facility Overview

### Shetakis Wholesalers - Facility Data

Description	Approximate Size - Sq Ft	Storage		Comments	Capacity	
		Height	Temp		Pull Slots	Overstock
Land Area	4.21 Acres	N / A	Ambient			
Executive Office	10,340	N / A	HVAC			
Dry Dock	10,800	25'	60 - 80	15 Dock doors with dock levelers		
Dry Warehouse A	38,077	25'	60 - 80		95%	80%
Dry Warehouse B	11,000	18'	60 - 80	Partially racked	N/A	25%
Deli Cooler *	4,550	16'	36		100%	120%
Meat / Chicken Cooler *	2,337	15'	28		90%	100%
Freezer	11,319	16'	-10		105%	120%
Cooler Dock *	2,485	16'	50 - 60	2 Dock doors without dock levelers	100%	100%
Freezer Dock *	1,677	16'	50 - 60	3 Dock doors with dock levelers	100%	100%
Battery / Equipment	6,825	18	60-80			
Showroom	1,520	N / A	HVAC	Former showroom / future offices		
Facility Storage	1,520	N / A	60 - 80	Storage area above showroom		
	102,450					
Total Cooler *	11,049					
Total Refrigerated	22,368					

## Fleet Overview

### Shetakis Motor Vehicles

Qty.	Vehicle Description	Comments
1	1999 Isuzu 15" Refrigerated Bobtail	Shetakis Owned
2	2004 Peterbilt 24' Refrigerated Bobtail	Full Service Lease
9	2004 Peterbilt Tractor	Full Service Lease
4	2008 Peterbilt Tractor	Full Service Lease
2	1997 Ford F350 Refrigerated Van	Shetakis Owned
2	1997 Utility 28' Refrigerated Trailer	Shetakis Owned
12	1994 - 1997 36' Refrigerated Trailer	Owned - (The average age of the refrigeration units on these trailers is 3 years.)
1	1997 48' Refrigerated Trailer	Shetakis Owned

## Management Biographies

### Lonnie Wright, Chairman and CEO

Professor Lonnie Wright, a native Las Vegas, served as Chair of the Resorts and Gaming Department at CCSN for three and a half years. He was then promoted to Dean of the Hospitality Programs and Services and again promoted to his current position as Associate Vice President. Professor Wright has over twenty-five years gaming, resort, and hotel hospitality, teaching, training, and fund raising experience. Professor Wright taught Hotel Administration for two and a half years at UNLV and was recruited by the American College of Singapore to develop a Hotel College in Singapore. Professor Wright had the opportunity to hold almost every position in the hotel and casino industry, excelling at numerous properties; positions included porter, security, surveillance, assistant hotel manager, dealer, and floor supervisor.

As Director of UNLV's Basketball Alumni Association, Professor Wright was successful in raising over \$3 million to scholarship the educational pursuits of over 100 athletes who obtained bachelors and masters degrees. Given his longevity in Las Vegas, Professor Wright has developed strong affiliations with the major players in the hospitality industry and overall with the business industry. Professor Wright's community service includes his position as the Vice President of the Tri-State NAACP, serving Nevada, Utah, and Idaho.

### Charles Jackson, COO

Mr. Jackson brings to Shetakis over 27 years of foodservice experience in the areas of marketing, purchasing, management information systems, and sales. For the first 10 years of his career, he was the General Manager of a large restaurant. From 1984 to 1991, Mr. Jackson served as Director of Purchasing and Marketing of Restaurant Food Supply, a Columbus, Ohio-based foodservice distributor. From 1991 to 1995, he held the position of Vice President of Marketing and Procurement at Alliant Foodservice (formerly Kraft Food Service). From 1995 to 1998, he served as Executive Vice President in charge of Purchasing, Sales and Marketing at U.S. Foodservice's Las Vegas branch (formerly Valley Foods). From 1998 until joining Shetakis in June 2001, Mr. Jackson served as COO for FoodMarketplace.com.

Mr. Jackson is responsible for the overall management of the company

### Andrew Dannin, CFO/Corporate Counsel

Mr. Dannin has held the positions of CFO and internal Corporate Counsel since co-founding LevelSource in early 2000. He formerly worked as a consultant with Deloitte & Touche LLP, a position he held from 1995 until 2000. While at Deloitte & Touche, Mr. Dannin consulted Fortune 1000 companies, including Microsoft, Gateway, Kroger, Office Depot, Kohlberg, Kravis, Roberts & Co., and Rite Aid on issues related to mergers and acquisitions, finance, taxation, employee benefits and general accounting solutions. He holds a bachelor's degree in business from Tulane University and a law degree from New York University School of Law.

Mr. Dannin is responsible for all of the company's financial statements and records, accounting, operational analysis, budgeting, banking and cash flow management, income taxes, insurance, human resources and internal legal matters. All company administrative staff report directly to Mr. Dannin.

Michael Winburn, Vice President of Operations

Mr. Winburn joined Shetakis in his present position in June 2001 and brings over a decade of foodservice distribution and operations experience. He formerly worked as a senior member of the operations management team for US Foodservice's Las Vegas facility (formerly Valley Foods). Mr. Winburn was eventually responsible for ensuring the timely and accurate receipt, storage and delivery of more than \$350 million in annual foodservice sales. Other significant operational accomplishments include the design, construction, and management of multiple-phase construction projects in excess of 400,000 square feet and two facility relocations.

Mr. Winburn has overall management responsibility for the Company's warehouse and delivery functions, covering all aspects of product movement and storage, from in-bound freight logistics, receiving and placement to picking, staging, loading, vehicle fleet routing and driver management. Additional duties include warehouse, vehicle, materials handling and telecommunications equipment maintenance, employee safety, operational efficiency, facility planning and productivity analysis.

Connie LaFlamme, Director of Purchasing

Connie heads up a team of talented and seasoned buyers that bring over 100 years of foodservice experience to the Purchasing Department at Shetakis. She has worked for Shetakis since moving to Las Vegas 8 years ago. Connie has an extensive background in management and spent over 15 years in the Hospitality and Food and Beverage industries. She brings market knowledge and innovative thinking to the Shetakis team.

## **6.2 Emergency Response Capability**

---

Shetakis Wholesalers has implemented procedures through all departments that are assisting in the development of a formal Disaster Recovery Plan. At this time we do not have a formal written plan, but are in the process of developing a formal plan that will aid in a quick recovery in the event of any disaster that we may encounter. We have relationships with trade partners, vendors and local contract storage facilities that will assist us in servicing our customers in the event of a facility related disaster.

## **6.3 Insurance**

---

### **Property - TRAVELERS**

Building - \$6,000,000

Business Personal Property Excluding Stock - \$500,000

Stock - \$3,300,000

Business Income - \$4,600,000

### **General Liability - TRAVELERS**

General Aggregate Limit - \$2,000,000

### **Umbrella - TRAVELERS**

Aggregate Limits of Liability - \$4,000,000

### **Automobile - TRAVELERS**

Liability - \$1,000,000

### **Employee Benefits - TRAVELERS**

Aggregate Limit - \$2,000,000

### **Worker's Compensation - THE HARTFORD**

Employer's Liability - \$1,000,000

## **6.4 System Capabilities**

---

Shetakis system architecture includes:

Enterprise Software Provider: Retalix PowerEnterprise

Host System: IBM iSeries 520

Internal Network: Microsoft Server 2003

Routing System: UPS Logistics RoadNet

Fleet GPS: UPS Logistics/Nextel

E-Commerce Integrator: Retalix Power Integrator

EDI Translator: Extol Integrator  
EDI Portal: Extol Portal  
Online Information/Ordering System: Retailix PowerNet located at [www.shetakis.com](http://www.shetakis.com)

EDI Capabilities:

EXTOL is a leading provider of B2B integration application software for the mid sized enterprise. EXTOL enables companies to exchange and integrate transactions and documents, regardless of form or format, between their applications and those of their partners. EXTOL Business Integrator is a B2B integration platform underlying applications for Electronic Commerce. EXTOL equips the mid-sized enterprise to succeed by providing the software and services needed for initiatives such as EDI, AS2, XML, UCCnet, and some of the new, next big e-things. The EXTOL business integration platform includes the integration and management functionality needed to take full advantage of supply chain functionality.

We can support data exchange for the following EDI transaction sets:

- 810 Invoice
- 820 Payment Order /Remittance
- 832 Price / Sales Catalogue
- 844 Charge-backs to Vendor
- 849 Reconciliation from Vendor
- 850 Purchase Order
- 852 Product Activity Data
- 855 Purchase Order Acknowledgement
- 856 Advanced Ship Notice
- 860 PO Change Request – Buyer
- 865 PO Change Request – Seller
- 867 Sales Data to Vendor
- 875 Grocery Products Purchase Order
- 876 Grocery Products PO Change
- 879 Price Information
- 880 Grocery Products Invoice
- 882 DSD Summary Information
- 888 Item Maintenance
- 889 Promotion Announcement
- 894 Delivery / Return Base Record
- 997 Functional Acknowledgement

Inventory management -- Shetakis inventory is real-time, perpetual. System reports are generated for monitoring exceptions.

Shetakis.com – Shetakis' entire product catalogue with real-time inventory levels is available on-line. Users may generate purchase reports, as well as access past invoices and credits.



## **6.5 Ordering, Billing, Returns and Credit Notes**

---

Ordering – Orders may be placed by fax, telephone, or on-line. Orders may be placed until 5:30 p.m. daily for delivery the next day. Order cut-off for same day deliveries is 10:00 a.m.

Billing -- Billing is done from invoice. Statements will not be sent.

Returns/Credit – Customer is not to return merchandise to Shetakis Wholesalers without authorization. All requests for return or adjustment of dry groceries must be reported within seven (7) days of receipt of merchandise and include the invoice number, customer code and invoice date in order for the customer to receive the full amount of credit due.

In the situation of frozen and perishable merchandise, returns requested after time of delivery must be inspected and authorized by your Account Executive. All returned merchandise must reach us in resalable condition and must be packed in its original carton. Credit for the return will be issued after inspection and at the discretion of Shetakis Inventory Control Manager.

Special order merchandise, items made to order, specially designed, crested or imprinted cannot be exchanged or returned.

Delivery Size – This program is based on an average delivery size exceeding \$10,000, with five (5) regularly scheduled deliveries per week for each property.

Exception deliveries (same day for emergencies) will be handled on an individual basis. Exception deliveries and delivery frequency will be monitored by month. In order to maintain proposed margins, these exceptions must be kept to a minimum.

P-Cards – Shetakis is open to any method of payment that does not add cost to the system.

## **6.6 Management Reports**

---

Shetakis can produce management reports to meet any specific need. We have an in-house IT staff that will develop reports. Examples of reports are attached.

## **6.7 Quality Assurance**

---

Through an active quality assurance department Shetakis provides:

- Confidence in the quality, value, and safety of the products that you buy from us
- Access to the technical product information
- Assistance in complying with federal food safety laws
- Resolving your complaints related to product quality
- Keeping you up-to-date on product cuttings and monitoring activities of the Quality Assurance department

**'Cuttings'** Product cuttings enable buyers to objectively evaluate products. These cuttings can be competitive evaluations or they may measure performance against certain established standards.

**'Food Safety'** is one of the most critical components for any foodservice operator. Shetakis will provide access to food safety information and regulatory updates as well as information developed by our staff.

**'Recalls'** Shetakis has a tested, written recall procedure that is in compliance with all USDA and FDA standards.

## **6.8 Diversity Programs**

---

Shetakis is a Certified Minority Business Enterprise (MBE). Certification was completed by the Nevada Minority Business Council in May of 2006, and has been renewed annually since that date.

Shetakis is a member of and actively supports the Latin Chamber of Commerce, the Urban Chamber of Commerce, and the Nevada Minority Business Council.

## **6.9 Environmental and Energy Management Programs**

---

Shetakis Wholesalers embraces the ideas of Reduce, Reuse & Recycle. In addition to utilizing recycled paper where applicable, we participate in an office recycling program in which we securely dispose of all office paper that is then recycled, thus reducing our impact on our landfills and contributing to the supply of materials available for global recycling. We are currently in the final stages of a lighting upgrade program in which we have upgraded most of the light fixtures within our facility to energy saving fixtures and bulbs. We have installed strip doors on all of our delivery vehicles, thus improving temperature controls and reducing fuel consumption. Our delivery vehicles are equipped with extended idle shutdowns that prevent the engines from idling when parked for more than 90 seconds. We continue to search for ideas and equipment that will reduce our energy consumption and operating costs.

## **6.10 Employee Hiring Practices and Training**

---

We believe that our single most important asset is our employees. A successful employee starts with the hiring process. All applicants are pre-screened for qualifications, interviewed by two managers, drug tested and when applicable must complete food safety training, a driving test and pre-employment physical. After a new employee joins our team they are fully trained in the operational & safety aspects of their position and exposed to other positions that either affects them or in which their position affects. With an understanding of other roles in our organization, our employees can work together more efficiently. The success of our employee practices is evident in the performance and tenure of our current employees.

## 6.11 Financial Information

The following ratios reflect each department's percentage of overall operational costs.

- Warehouse – 29%
- Transportation – 22%
- Administration – 32%
- Sales and Marketing – 17%

## 5.1 Measurements

Shetakis will provide Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) to allow you and Shetakis to measure performances and develop a program for constant improvement.

The following KPI's are either currently measured or can be measured in the future. See attached reports for more detail.

- Specified Products shortage rate - Measured as the percentage of order lines for Specified Products that were not filled as ordered as a percent of total order lines – Target 0.25%
  - Not currently measured
  - After specified products are awarded
  - Currently measure overall fill rate
  - Measured as cases shipped / cases ordered – without substitutions
  - Q1 – 2008 = 98.71%
- Perfect Orders – Measured as the percent of orders delivered complete as initially ordered without substitution as a percent of total orders shipped – Target 85%
  - Currently measured
  - Measured as error free deliveries / total deliveries
  - Note: Deliveries may have multiple invoices, any invoice error for that delivery voids the delivery
  - Q1 – 2008 = 81.67%
  - See attached report
- Perfect orders with substitution – Measured as the percent of orders delivered complete as initially ordered with approved substitution as a percent of total orders shipped – Target 92%
  - Not currently measured
  - We currently do not remove items ordered from the invoice
  - Any substitution created an error
- Line Fill Rate – Measured as the percent of lines filled over total lines ordered – Target 98.5

- Currently measured
- Measured as line items with-out any error / total line items
- Q1 – 2008 = 97.6%
- See attached report

- On-time Delivery – Appointment. Measured as the percentage of shipments delivered within 30 minutes of the property stipulated delivery window – target 99.0%
  - Not currently measured
  - Currently no defined delivery windows
- RMA to Credit Note Turnaround – Average number of days from the date a RMA # is issued to the date that the credit note is posted to Customer's account – target 5 days
  - Not currently measured
- Invoicing Accuracy - Measured on the number of correctly presented invoices as a percentage of total invoices – target 99.0%
  - Not currently measured
- Shetakis agrees to work with customer to develop the following KPI reports:
  - Average Delivery Revenue Measured as total period distributor revenue divide by the number of deliveries(excluding emergency deliveries) by property and in total
  - Cross dock utilization – Measured as the number of deliveries avoided
  - Key Vendor Performance – Measures order fill rates for customer direct negotiated suppliers
  - Stocked Items Report – Measure of the number of SKU's carried organized by product category

### Shetakis Wholesalers - Order Accuracy Report By line Items Keyed

	WE -1	WE -2	WE -3	WE -4	WE -5	WE -6	WE -7	WE -8	
	11/12/07	11/05/07	10/29/07	10/22/07	10/15/07	10/08/07	10/01/07	09/24/07	%
Total Line Items Keyed	8034	8314	7952	8482	8552	8388	8303	8418	
Customer Service Line Items	5555	4619	4723	5353	5957	5757	5689	6167	65%
Sales Line Items	2479	3695	3229	3129	2595	2631	2614	2251	35%
Total Line Item Errors	318	369	407	436	503	367	420	402	
Order Accuracy %	96%	96%	95%	95%	94%	96%	95%	95%	
Total Line Item Errors %	4%	4%	5%	5%	6%	4%	5%	5%	
Price Adjustment	5	8	16	3	5	4	29	1	2%
Cancelled Invoice	12	34	42	20	48	16	27	15	6%
Delivery Refused by Customer	1	5	1	2	6	11	2	1	1%
Miskey by Customer Service	18	31	19	25	91	18	18	19	7%
Miskey by Sales	6	18	21	14	11	13	10	4	3%
Not on Truck Driver Error	8	3	2	2	3	0	7	4	1%
Not on Truck Puller Error	8	7	4	14	3	8	9	4	2%
Damage on Truck	2	2	5	5	1	9	3	6	1%
Delivery / Driver Error	0	3	0	2	0	0	2	1	0%
Customer Ordered in Error	49	28	22	38	39	57	47	44	10%
Picking Error	8	9	3	11	3	8	10	3	2%
Extra Item on Truck	2	7	6	12	11	15	10	10	2%
Bad Product Ret. To Whse.	16	2	8	6	9	6	7	9	3%
Bad Product - Manufacturer	1	2	0	1	0	2	2	2	0%
Bad Product - Customer Dump	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0%
Sales Tax Refund	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0%
Returned Sub Item	8	7	4	12	4	5	3	6	2%
Out of Stock	172	203	254	268	268	195	234	273	58%