

Stephanie Sparkles at Imperial Palace



STEPHANIE NIELSON IS A VERY BUSY EXECUTIVE AT THE IMPERIAL PALACE, BUT SHE STILL FINDS TIME FOR A SOCIAL LIFE. HERE SHE'S PICTURED AT A RECENT "LAST M*A*S*H BASH" WITH ENTERTAINER/ACTOR LEE SHAEI.

Stephanie Nielson packs three days work into every working day at the Imperial Palace. She puts in a day as Director of Advertising, a day as Director of Publicity and one as Director of Entertainment.

"I feel like I've added three years to my career in the past year," she says of her fast-paced job. "The Imperial Palace has expanded so rapidly, it amazes me to look back just 12 months."

Prior to Stephanie's appointment to the position she holds, advertising was handled by an outside firm. The dance extravaganza BRAVO VEGAS played in the showroom and two lounge groups played in the Geisha Lounge on a long term contract.

But the President of the Imperial Palace, Ralph Engelstad, and his Executive Director, Ed Crispell, could see the major push in publicity and advertising that the hotel would soon need with the ambitious building plans Engelstad had underway. At the same time, it was decided to change the entertainment in the showroom and the lounge.

"Their feeling -- and I agree, -- was that an outside firm couldn't handle the hotel's needs as well as people right here on the property," Stephanie explained.

One doesn't have to look far for evidence of how effective advertising and publicity for the Imperial Palace has been. With the opening of a new 650 tower in August, the Imperial Palace became the sixth largest property in Las Vegas. Occupancy is running 90%. The casino uses every square foot of space for tables and slots to accommodate their players.

"We used to have a beautiful antique car rotating in the casino to advertise the Auto Collection," Stephanie says, "but the casino is doing such great business, it was removed to add more games. The poker room has become so popular, they're full to overflowing every day."

Besides five restaurants, the Imperial Palace has a popular buffet now on the third floor. Breakfast and lunch (\$2.47) each and dinner (\$3.47) keeps a steady line of customers coming in. To draw late night business, a 99¢ breakfast is featured in the Teahouse from 11 p.m. until 7 a.m.

"Jack Truran, our Food Director, is very aggressive and talented. He and all of the employees at the Imperial Palace work actively to always improve the hotel's services. This week we introduced a 99¢ shrimp cocktail to be served in the Sake Bar and the Geisha Lounge. We already have a Happy Hour in the Geisha Lounge with 50¢ beer and 75¢ well drinks. Also, this week we've expanded the entertainment. It now starts at 10:00 a.m. and continues until

4:00 a.m.!"

Stephanie claims to like Advertising and Publicity equally to Entertainment, but in the short time she has been with the Imperial Palace, she has brought Redd Foxx, Lovelace Watkins, The Mickey Finn Show, The Mamas and The Papas and Gary Puckett to the hotel. In addition to being instrumental in securing entertainment for the showroom, she has had some very well known groups appear in the Geisha Lounge. Some of the talent that has appeared over the past few months are Carleen and Co., The Smith Brothers, Perfecto and Motion, Vincent!, Chazz, Karen Cavanaugh, Marilyn Johnson, Streetcar and Chuy's Co. To show how successful the above groups have been, they all have return dates this year. It's not surprising if it appears that Entertainment might be favored among her three titles. Stephanie, before coming to the Imperial Palace was Corporate Entertainment Director for all five of Major Riddle properties.

"I enjoyed working for Major Riddle. Sometimes I feel that is why I came to the Imperial Palace to work for Ralph Engelstad. I enjoy my work and it's nice to be able to work for a hotel when all the decisions are made by one man. It saves so much time to be able to get a yes or a no without waiting for weeks as is the case with some corporate properties."

Major Riddle owned four casinos, one with a hotel that included a 750 seat showroom.

"Working for Major Riddle was a challenging experience," she says. "I had a showroom and five lounges to book. During the five years I worked for Mr. Riddle, I enjoyed bringing in some very special shows. One that I was most proud of was "Ipi Tombi." It was an African musical that I'm pleased to say, won the best new musical of the year. Other shows I enjoyed bringing in included Ray Charles, Tina Turner, Brenda Lee and Roger Miller. The Silverstar Lounge was also a challenge with 250 seats. I booked groups like The Checkmates, Freddie Bell, Denise Clemente and Pete Willcox."

Prior to working for Major Riddle at the Silverbird, which has since been rebuilt and named the El Rancho, Stephanie held positions with Del Webb Hotels International handling their in-house advertising agency for their commercial properties.

Before coming to Las Vegas, she enjoyed a career in the motion picture and television industry. In fact, for a year, prior to returning to Las Vegas to work for the Imperial Palace, she was Vice-President of Production for Jaffe/Blakely Films. Susan Blakely's movie for television on the life of Frances Farmer was one of the projects that Stephanie worked on during her

return to Los Angeles.

Her prior experience in that industry included a position with ABC Television, several years at Universal Studios in advertising and publicity and finally before her move to Las Vegas, working for one of the most prestigious public relations firms in Beverly Hills, Rogers and Cowan.

"With so many years in the motion picture and television industry I'm often asked why I keep coming back to Las Vegas." She explains, "The answer is simple. This is my home town. I graduated from Western High School and spent my early days writing publicity releases and handling special publicity promotions for Wayne Newton. Working for such a tremendous talent at age 16, you might say, my career in the entertainment industry was established. After working with Wayne Newton, I knew I would spend the rest of my life in this business. I honestly feel that advertising, publicity and entertainment are so interrelated that it's easier to work when I'm involved with all three."

As far as her present position with the Imperial Palace, Stephanie is very excited with the direction the hotel is heading. "We have so many plans at the Imperial Palace," she explains. "We are planning the opening of a new restaurant and some exciting casino promotions in the next few months. This past year the Antique Auto Run was so successful, our plans for this year's event will be even more exciting."

With an obvious busy schedule at the hotel, is there any time left for relaxation? "Definitely! I love to ski and play tennis." Stephanie explains. "I used to own a beautiful Arabian horse, but my schedule doesn't give me the time needed to own a horse." I, recently, joined Joseph Bernard's Acting Studio. I did some acting and modeling when I was in college and continued to study after college but with only moderate success. My modeling career lasted several years, but after two roles, one as a dancer in a show that was to be competition for "Shindig" that never aired; and an acting role in a film that might air some night as the late, late, movie, I gave it up. I now enjoy working behind the scenes. But, I did enjoy acting and I'm looking forward to working with Joe Bernard. After attending several of his acting showcases, it looked like too much fun to pass up."

As far as romance goes, Stephanie will not offer any information but for the past few years, she has often been seen with her special friend, Lee Shael, who is an entertainer/actor, sometimes referred to as Mr. Fairway Chevrolet, for his many TV commercials. Stephanie is pictured with Lee Shael above at the recent M*A*S*H Bash Party held at Caesars Palace.

If the past is any indication of the future, the Imperial Palace's expansion and success this past year projects a bright future. And Stephanie Nielson is eager to continue the challenge.

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