

GLOBAL Gaming Business

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10 Most Influential PEOPLE IN GAMING

FRONT LINE OR BEHIND THE SCENES, THESE FOLKS MAKE THE INDUSTRY ROLL

CHINESE PROVERBS

WHY THE CULTURE AND PHILOSOPHY OF CHINA ENCOURAGES GAMBLING

Pennsylvania Promise
Revenue rolls in as new casinos, racinos open in the Keystone State

James Maida, President,
Gaming Laboratories International



STEVE RITTVO

PRESIDENT, THE INNOVATION GROUP OF COMPANIES

As someone versed in urban planning and traffic engineering, Steve Rittvo has expanded his field of influence quite a bit since he was introduced to the gaming industry in the early 1990s. As head of Urban Systems, Rittvo was engaged by Chris Hemmeter, a hotel developer and one of the first bidders for the New Orleans casino, to study traffic patterns near the proposed gaming site. He later became the master-planner and principal analyst for that casino project.

"That was our introduction to gaming, and it was pure luck," says Rittvo. "Later, after Louisiana instituted riverboat gambling, I was able to option a piece of land in Lake Charles, right on the Texas border. We took that to 21 casino companies until we partnered with Players International. And we ended up with license No. 2 in Louisiana."

With the combination of consulting and being involved in his own project, Rittvo got up to speed quickly on gaming. But the real breakthrough was his ability to develop and refine forecasting models for casino revenue when gaming companies were considering jurisdictions and specific sites. The next big move for Rittvo was to partner with Jason Ader, who was at the time the leading investment bank gaming analyst with Bear Stearns. They developed the "Global Gaming Almanac," which reported revenues and forecasts for every gaming destination around the world.

"That allowed both of us to grow and become recognized as the leaders in our segments of the industry," says Rittvo. "We met most of the major players in the gaming industry during that time and developed a credibility that few companies had achieved up to that point."

The Innovation Group quickly became one of the leading consulting companies in the gaming

industry. Rittvo partnered with Steve Szapor, the former president of the Sahara in Las Vegas, and the company began a rapid growth spurt. In the last few years, the company has added a financial division, headed by Matt Sodl, that funds projects up to \$100 million; a marketing arm that does market research and develops marketing plans for smaller casinos; a food-and-beverage division that does research on customer preference and trends, while providing advice on business planning; and a management segment that can take over operations at a distressed property for the owners/investors if necessary. Another successful division has been the construction sector, headed by the former Harrah's/Caesars VP of construction, Bob Kelly, that assists tribes and small casino owners as the project manager for any new construction or renovation project.

On the international scene, Rittvo has been penetrating markets in Asia, South America and Europe. His knowledge of operations has been valuable to clients whose knowledge of the business came only in passing.

"We believe that the international market will be the most dynamic in the next few years," he says. "That's why we're concentrating on new jurisdictions with the possibility for healthy expansion and a reasonable regulatory system."

With the economic crisis, Rittvo is seeing a lot of activity in the company, particularly in the construction and management side of the business.

"We're offering a chance to reduce costs and effectively manage through this difficult time," he explains. "There's a lot of opportunity for us to be able to leverage our experience to help those companies that may not know where to go at this point."

"We've moved from number-crunching to helping people set up programs that will really work for them."

—Roger Gros

Working Man

JOHN WILHELM,

PRESIDENT, UNITE HERE

Working for a living is something that John Wilhelm knows intimately. Since graduating with high honors from Yale, Wilhelm has helped organize workers at the lower rungs of the employment ladder. As an organizer in New Haven, his persuasiveness allowed hotel workers to join the former HERE (the Hotel Employees & Restaurant Employees Union).

When he was appointed to lead organizing efforts in Las Vegas in 1987, a seminal moment for the gaming resort, his diplomacy and advocacy for the front-line and back-of-the-house workers paid dividends for both the city and the employees.

He describes the current dust-up about the "card check" provision of the proposed Employee Free Choice Act as a misdirection, and explains how card check worked for Las Vegas during that period.

"Remember, this was the period when all the major casino resorts were built in Las Vegas," he says. "We were able to organize all of them—except the Venetian—through card check. Now, granted, management agreed to allow us to do it this way, but I contend that the growth of Las Vegas during this time would never have been accomplished without card check. You had labor peace in Las

