

An Oral History of George Flint

4th Street | Prater Way History Project

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Interviewer: Will von Tagen

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GEORGE FLINT

Interviewed on April 4, 2012

Will von Tagen, Interviewer

An ordained minister, George Flint grew up in southern California and moved to Reno after completing divinity school. In 1961, he founded the Chapel of the Bells at 540 West Fourth Street, and four years later, moved the business into a converted home at 700 West Fourth Street. He discusses Reno's wedding chapel industry and the changes he has witnessed through more than fifty years in the business.

Photo by Patrick Cummings

von Tagen: I'm here today with George Flint, the owner of Chapel of the Bells on West Fourth Street. We're presently in Chapel of the Bells, and today is April 4, 2012. George, can you tell me, when were you born?

Flint: I was born on April 12, 1934, which means I'm about eight days short of being seventy-eight.

von Tagen: Where were you born?

Flint: In southern California at the port of Los Angeles, which is called San Pedro.

von Tagen: What stands out to you in your childhood?

Flint: Well, I don't know how to answer that. I spent my first nine or ten years living in southern California. Then my parents relocated to Wyoming during the Second World War to be near some of their Japanese friends who had been relocated there in the holding or concentration camps that the federal government saw fit to move them into during the war.

Then after the war we stayed in Wyoming and I finished seven years of public schooling there. I had a good growing-up, and the highlight of my years toward the end were that I was an accomplished sports writer for the particular high school I attended. It went beyond that in that my work was accepted enough in the state of Wyoming that I became a kind of a runner for several of the newspapers, the larger papers in Wyoming. I turned down a full-bore four-year scholarship to go to the University of Wyoming and study journalism to follow my parents' wishes for me. That was to study religion. Do I have regrets sometimes? Yes, but you can't look back.

von Tagen: What was it about religion that interested your parents?

Flint: Oh, my parents were both fanatical religionists, as their parents were before them. When I say fanatical religionists, they were Pentecostal religionists, very devout; they

would go to church every day of the week, almost. They were from that era of the early-day fundamentalists, where almost anything that was fun was sinful. As a kid, I wasn't allowed to go to dances or go to the motion picture theater. I never smoked and I don't to this day, never had a problem, because if I'd have come home with cigarettes, I'd have probably had my arm cut off.

They were just very, very strict fundamental Christians. I don't think there are very many today who fall into that category, because religion, as so many things, evolves up and down. The same people then from churches like the Assembly of God Church, who were so fanatical in their behavior, they have almost done a 180-degree turn today. What was terribly sinful and wrong when I was a teenager is accepted by those same people or their offspring and their children and grandchildren as being perfectly okay.

I didn't grow up with a lot of appreciation toward the church because of the fact that it was rammed down my throat, both my sister and I—it's just two siblings—it was rammed down our throat to the place that you almost develop a negative attitude where you want to go the other direction.

Being a preacher's kid—and that's what I was because my parents were ministers—I looked at other preachers' kids and there was generally a revolt among preachers' children because of this sort of thing. A lot of them—they called them PKs or preachers' kids—absolutely turned their backs on the church and anything religious. I never did, really. I always maintained a faith and a belief, but I never harbored the same fanaticism that my parents did.

As I look back, it was terribly severe. I'd sneak off on occasion and go to the movies, and when I came out of the theater, I had to look both ways to be damn sure that my parents didn't happen to be driving down the street, this sort of thing. When *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* came out, I think I was in second grade, about 1940, and the school—we were still in California—was invited to a free matinee in the local town theater showing of that motion picture. We had to bring a signed slip from home. Well, my parents said that it was God's will that I would not go to such a sinful thing and, as a result, out of the 360 kids in school, I was the only one not allowed to go to the movie. In fact, they had to keep a teacher back at the school to babysit me while everybody else was at the motion picture theater. So that kind of shows you the extremism that I was subjected to in my youthful years.

As a result, I have to be candid with you and tell you that I never appreciated my parents very much. Their whole life was their church, and I could hardly wait to get away from that. Yet I followed their wishes and I went to three different divinity schools, and finished my schooling in 1956, but I was never called, in my own mind, to go into the ministry. Yet having this wedding chapel, in a sense, would probably have never happened if I hadn't have had that religious background, because the government officials were very, very strict when I started fifty years ago that unless you had a ministerial background and were active in some sort of a ministry effort, you couldn't officiate and perform weddings.

So one thing led to another, and here I am today, fifty years later, but I'm one of the few wedding chapel operators today, either in [Las] Vegas or Reno, who really comes from a trained divinity or religious background. Most of them are people that just got into the business because they thought it was a nice business to get into, and most chapels hire other ministers to come and do the weddings. I've always been able to do my own.

von Tagen: Did you have any significant childhood or adolescent romances?

Flint: There were some girls I enjoyed, from maybe even the seventh grade through high school, but I never dated, mainly because of the fact that I wasn't allowed to do those things. For example, I couldn't go to the junior-senior prom in high school. I went to a junior high dance one time with a girl named Berdina Butler, who I was rather fond of. My father got word of the fact that I was at that dance, and he came in and yanked me off the dance floor, leaving Berdina standing there helpless by herself. He took me home and took a belt and beat me so bad that I thought I might not be able to walk for a week. If he'd have treated me today like he did then, he probably would have gone to prison for child abuse.

There were other girls that I was fond of, but I never developed any real attachments, mainly because I realized that I couldn't offer the benefits that most young ladies want as far as dating and that sort of thing. When I did go off to seminary, I got involved with a young lady who was also a student there, and we married a year after high school and had four children. So that area where most kids date is pretty much a void in my formative years.

von Tagen: What were your friendships like?

Flint: Oh, I had some good friendships. In Wyoming, a lot of fellows banded together in hunting, big-game hunting, that sort of thing. Also because of my background in sports journalism, I was accepted and I was part of every traveling athletic squad from that high school, almost an extension of the coach. So I had some good friendships.

In fact, I was talking to a gentleman today who I finished high school with, and that was sixty years ago. I still have contact with five or six, maybe seven kids I graduated with, and there were only about forty in our class. So I think that's kind of unique in that there were friendships created in grades seven through twelve that have lasted sixty and more years.

von Tagen: How exactly did you get involved with sports journalism writing?

Flint: It wasn't my idea. The little school I went to, which was about 220 kids, always had a handpicked student who wasn't active in athletics, as far as being an athlete, to work with the athletic director who coached most of the various sports, and this person almost became an extension of the coach and did all the statistical work and all of the sports coverage not only for the two local papers, but for the big city papers in Casper and Cheyenne.

Early on, late in my sophomore year, Floyd Hart, who was the athletic director, came to me and said, "Flint, I'd like you to take over," he named the other person that was graduating, "I'd like you to take over that job." Candidly, I didn't know anything about what I was doing, but I learned pretty fast.

I am proud of the fact that I developed a pretty good name for myself in the state—it's a small state, of course—in that there were times that the *Tribune* and *Eagle* in Cheyenne, and the *Morning Star* in Casper actually retained me, as a high school kid, to

cover athletic events for them when they didn't have staff to send. I was the only high school student among all the professional journalists who had access to the press boxes both at the football and basketball games at the university in Laramie.

von Tagen: Do you have any regrets that you didn't continue in that field?

Flint: Of course, but you can't really build on those regrets because my life has been good. I've had fifty years in Reno that have been very interesting and very fulfilling, and had I gone that direction, I wouldn't have had the same family I have today. I wouldn't have the same kids. I think it would be disrespectful for them to say that I regret the fact that I did what I did and that they came into the world and so on. In reality, you have regrets and yet you don't have regrets that are haunting or that bother you on a day-to-day basis.

I've looked at other people. Curt Gowdy was a recognized sports journalist who reached the ultimate in television coverage and television reporting, and he came from Wyoming. I probably could have gone a long ways in that endeavor, but I long ago set aside any what you would call real regrets.

von Tagen: Can you tell me about the first time you saw Reno?

Flint: Oh, I can't, because I was very small. My parents would travel back and forth to see family in Idaho when I was very small and would come through Reno, and then during my grades six through twelve we came through Reno. A lot of times we drove through at night and I was probably asleep in the back seat.

The first time I really remember Reno was when I came here in the summer of 1961. I came here on a visit, or it was on the tail end of a vacation, and the reason why my wife and I detoured from Sacramento going home to Oregon was the fact that my sister lived in Reno, and I was told she worked in a wedding chapel. So I said to my then-wife, that was my first wife, "We've got the time. Let's drive over to Reno and visit Virginia," my sister.

I was impressed with Reno. The Reno of fifty years ago was such a much more alive tourist destination than I find it today. If I have any regrets, it's the fact that Reno's gone downhill, particularly in the last thirty years, as a tourist destination. But I was impressed with Reno, and when I arrived here and saw this little wedding chapel my sister worked in, which was out on West Fourth by the now Mi Casa Too restaurant, there was only the little wedding chapel she worked in and one other one, which was called the Park Chapel. They opened, I believe, in '55, and now we're talking about '61. And kind of the camera clicked or the machine meshed or whatever you want to say. I said to my wife, "You know, this would be good for us. I've got a background in ministerial endeavor and religious things. I've got a pretty solid background in photography." Because it was more than just an avocation to my father. He was an accomplished photographer, and I grew up being pretty efficient in that area, too. I said, "I think those two things would work together. It'd be fun to get into this business."

At the time, I was a religious education director in a church in Oregon, but I wasn't married to that job, and I was really making my living in sales, traveling. I thought it'd be fun to move to Reno and open another wedding chapel. I could see where we

could improve on the two that existed in Reno already, and that's really how the whole thing fell into place that we moved here, and now we are almost starting our fifty-first year in business.

von Tagen: How much time had passed since you completed your seminary and you decided to open up?

Flint: About four years.

von Tagen: What do you remember being most fascinating to you, as far as the tourism industry in Reno at the time?

Flint: Well, when I came to Reno, I didn't have very much money, and what I had I borrowed, and I knew we weren't going to just overnight start making a return that would probably support us. So I applied for a job at Harrah's to basically pay the bills until the chapel became self-supporting. I think back to the summer of '62 when we opened for business, I was a change boy for fifteen bucks a day. Harrah's was so busy, Harolds Club was so busy, the Mapes was so busy, the Riverside was so busy that a lot of times you couldn't find a machine to play or a spot at a table to sit down and play Twenty-one. I was really amazed then as to how popular Reno was.

Now, about fifteen years later, Las Vegas began to really exploit itself with the big super resorts, the MGM and The Mirage and those sorts of operations, the real big places, and then along came the Indian casinos in California, and to some degree I think Reno just rolled over and said, "Well, we can't compete with the Indians. We sure as heck can't compete with Las Vegas. So we'd better just sit here and try to survive." I think the two men who really made Reno a hot place as a tourist destination were the late William Harrah and also the late Harold Smith, Jr. They were both marvelous exploiters of our gaming industry. They were great entrepreneurs of running the business. They both did heavy advertising in the Bay Area, and the people reacted positively and Reno swung. I mean, Reno really was an outstanding, blossoming, busy, weekend tourist destination city.

Now I see when I drive to Las Vegas, which I have to on business on occasion, I see more Oregon and Washington and Idaho cars between here and Vegas on the highway than I see Nevada cars, because I've come to the conclusion that most tourists now who really want to have a week's holiday in Nevada, will come from their home in Oregon or Washington or Idaho and they come to Reno for the first day, and they may walk across the street from the motel and play a little bit at the Silver Legacy or the Circus Circus, but for the most part, this is just a stopover. They drive on to Vegas for their week. Now, when they drive home, of course they have already spent all their money, so there's no use to stop in Reno at all.

But I'm very saddened about the general lack of promotional spirit in Reno. I said to our mayor, Bob Cashell, "Mayor, what are we going to do about this? This town is headed downhill fast." This was maybe seven, eight years ago, when he was first mayor.

He said, "Oh, George, don't bother me with this. I'm having too much fun being mayor." And it occurs to me, as I look at the City Council and the County Commission, that they have very little concern. They leave the promotion of Reno up to the Chamber

of Commerce. The Chamber of Commerce leaves it up to the Visitors and Convention Authority, and the truth of the matter is, nobody really does much.

Now, I have to give John Ascuaga credit. John's done a damn good job for Sparks and to some degree for even northern Nevada. Of course, he's nearly ninety now. In a way he worked hand-in-glove with Harrah and Smith, and those three separate entities did a wonderful job of promoting this part of Nevada tourist-wise. But with the early death of Bill Harrah, I think he was only sixty-two, and then the Smiths sold out to the Hughes Corporation and basically folded their tent and left the area—they were all getting up in years, of course—there has been nobody that ever stepped in to fill their shoes.

I happen to know that the gentle lady who runs Circus Circus for the Mirage Company in Las Vegas, she can hardly go to the restroom—forgive my candidness—without checking with Las Vegas. One of the things I think is unique is that you look at Harrah's and you look at the Silver Legacy and you look at Circus Circus, and they really are extensions of Las Vegas resort interests. To some degree, at least, I've always felt that Vegas considers Reno its stepchild, and even though they have investments here, they're more inclined to say, "The harder we support Reno or promote Reno or attempt to develop Reno, it's just going to take away from our Las Vegas business."

To some degree, South Lake Tahoe suffers from that same problem in that all your South Lake Tahoe properties also have their parent companies in Las Vegas. I believe all of them do. If they make a profit out of northern Nevada, fine. If they don't, let's not worry about it. I think that's really where they're at.

I have more people who come in here to be married, who came to Reno twenty or thirty years ago when they were kids, and they say, "What's happened to Reno?" I took a set of pictures that I took to the legislature's last session of all the closed downtown core buildings that are businesses that are now closed up. All you've got to do is turn left at West Fourth at Virginia and go north toward the university, and you see motel after motel after motel that no longer exists.

At one point, we had twenty operating wedding chapels in Reno in the seventies and early eighties. Today there are actually only four operating stand-alone chapels in Reno. Some of the resorts, like Ascuaga's Nugget and the Atlantis and the Peppermill, do have in-house chapels, but they don't operate commercially like we do. They're there to serve their guests. They don't exploit their chapels. So we've shrunk, for all practical purposes, from about twenty wedding chapels down to four. That's certainly understandable when you look at the fact that since 1978, which just coincidentally happens to be the year Mr. Harrah died, our wedding industry has shrunk from nearly 40,000 weddings a year to under 10,000 weddings a year.

At the same time, our local population has doubled, which really means that out of the 10,000 weddings that we may have this year if we're lucky, 30 to 35 percent of those weddings are locals. So we're down to the place now that instead of having 500 tourist weddings a week, we're lucky if we have 100 tourist weddings a week.

It isn't easy for me to maintain this chapel, now Reno's oldest wedding chapel. I was number three when I started. The rest of them all came after me, and most of them have died. But I worry that as I look around the town, as I listen to and I talk to politicians, that they're all concerned about the budget for firefighting, and they're all concerned about education and the tax base, etc., etc., but you hardly ever hear any of

them talk about, "Let's try to bring the life, the tourist business back to Reno."

In fact, I've had old-time Reno people say to me, "Oh, the hell with tourism. Reno's a nice little city. We can get along without the tourists."

von Tagen: So would you say it's more the mindset of Reno or the mindset of outside America that has contributed to the decline?

Flint: Oh, I don't think the mindset of America is nearly as backwards as what I see as far as Reno goes. I took my wife on our last anniversary to Harrah's Steakhouse last November. Harrah's Steakhouse has always been among the finest restaurants in the state of Nevada. I was embarrassed for the restaurant that night by how bad the food was, how bad the service was, how generally unconcerned the staff was. I didn't make a big issue out of it but I said a couple thing to the maître d'. He said, "Well, it's an off night and we're short of help."

Our association that I represent, the Nevada Brothel Owners, had a one-day association meeting down at Harrah's about three years ago. They gave us this big lovely room, and I said, "If Mr. Harrah was here, he'd have a stroke." The Formica on the tables was cracked, the carpet wasn't clean, it was torn. Nobody seems to have any real motivation.

Now, let's talk about Fourth Street. Fourth Street is a disgrace today. I mean, you've got businesses closed. You've got businesses sitting empty that have been for years. Prostitution, the illegal prostitution on East and West Fourth Street is runaway, and, candidly, this only probably helps the Atlantis and the Peppermill in that this used to be the main feeder line into Reno prior to the freeway, and now it's the street that most people, for all practical purposes, would rather stay away from.

von Tagen: Is this the original site of your wedding chapel?

Flint: No, this is not the original site. The original site was half a block further east in a little frame building, which is a little Victorian house probably built around the turn of the century, in 1890, 1910, somewhere along in there. At the time that I was looking for a spot in Reno, it was a dry cleaner pick-up station. I saw a sign that said "Victor Cleaners." Now, that building was operated by another wedding chapel operator after I left there, and I had both places running for a while because I didn't leave that building until 1979.

Some Oriental interests, a Chinese family, bought that property, including that little house. If you drive down there, you'll notice about half of it's been torn down and cut away. I think they had plans to develop an Oriental market there and a restaurant, and the economy apparently interfered with that, because I see nothing's been accomplished. That little building's just sitting there decaying. But that was my original spot in Reno.

von Tagen: That was also on Fourth Street?

Flint: Right. It was 540 West Fourth. This is 700. When I came to Reno, I parked right across from what was then the Travelodge. Now it's called the Desert Rose Inn. I parked alongside the street. In those days, they had parking on the street, not parallel but

horizontal or whatever you call it. I looked at this building. I walked up to this corner and I thought, wow, would that building make a great wedding chapel. At that time, it was still red brick, hadn't been painted white, and a family lived in it. It was their home. There were a lot of homes and a lot of residences still being used then as residential properties.

Ironically, four years later I had a chance to buy the building, and by that time I could afford to, although I had also opened a wedding chapel in Las Vegas. So suddenly I found myself with a little spot here at 540 West Fourth, had a business in Vegas, and I still thought, wow, this would be the winner of all wedding chapels. I had to come up with \$10,000 for the down payment on it, that's what they wanted, and when I handed them the \$10,000, I had to find about eight more dollars in my sock, as it were, because it took every cent I had just to meet the down payment.

But we've had this building now since 1965, and I think we'll probably stay here several more years. We'll survive, in spite of the fact that weddings are off as badly as they are, mainly because the wedding industry's no longer feeding thirteen to eighteen wedding chapels; it's only feeding four. We're not making very much money at the moment, but I have some hopes that there will be people elected to the commission and the City Council that will have some interest or some motivation or some desire to do something special with Reno.

I've suggested to people that what we probably ought to do is duplicate what they have in Truckee, maybe even put in wooden sidewalks downtown and Western bands, and just get maybe even a little on the hokey side. That would certainly be an improvement from what you have downtown now, where you have store after store after store, particularly that area between the railroad trench and the Riverside Hotel or what was then the Riverside Hotel. You've got that entire west side of Virginia Street for about a block and a half, two blocks, where in fact, that have little, if any, current commercial occupancy.

So I won't say I'm depressed about the core of Reno, but I will say I'm saddened by it, because it bothers me that nobody seems to really have any sort of long-term goals or dreams to revitalize it. Now, we have this Redevelopment Authority, and they've done a nice job with the Riverwalk and developing the Truckee and so on, but that's pretty much for the local people. That isn't a tourist draw.

I've got some kids, part of the family, who live in Idaho and they grew up in Reno, and they refuse to come visit me anymore because they say Reno's so crappy-looking. It saddens me.

Now, we've hired a new director of the RSCVA, the Convention Visitors Authority, and he's here from Detroit, which is a tough town, and he has proposed a new advertising agenda on something like a million and a half dollars, and most of it is signboards and that sort of thing. He may get people to come back to Reno, but when they get here and see the way the town looks and so on, it may, in fact, even drive them more permanently away.

I had a lady call me on a business-related matter five, six years ago, and in the conversation I said, "Where are you?" And she told me she was in San Pablo, California. Well, that's on the east side of the Bay just north of Oakland. I said, "Are you a family person?"

She said, "Yes, we have teenage kids."

I said, "Do you come to Reno and visit?"

She said, "Funny thing you should ask me that." She said, "Reno was our favorite place to go until Reno went bankrupt."

I said, "What?"

She repeated it and used the word "bankrupt" again. I said, "Reno's not bankrupt."

She said, "Don't tell me that." She said, "Harolds Club is gone, the Onslow's gone, the Mapes is gone, the Kings Inn is gone." She named every single closed major property in the core of Reno. She said, "They're defunct. They no longer exist." And she said, "As a result, it depresses us to go to Reno."

Sure, if you go to the Silver Legacy and you never leave the building, you're going to be okay, basically, but people like to move about here, there, and yonder. I think the Eldorado should almost be ashamed of themselves for the fact that their greed—and this is my personal perspective—their greed has been to keep their own personal clients so entombed in the Eldorado and the Silver Legacy that they don't want to go anywhere else in town. To some degree, I blame the Carano family for a certain mentality that has helped literally shrink downtown Reno to where it is right now.

von Tagen: If you were to walk a ways down Fourth Street in the sixties when you first arrived, and then turn around and come back and walk back in today's times, what sort of perceptions might you see and emotions might you feel?

Flint: Well, of course, the Sundowner is the biggest property on Fourth Street that didn't make it, and they hung in there for about fifteen or twenty years and finally threw the towel in. But I would say the biggest perception that's depressing to me is that both on East and West Fourth you used to have your choice of maybe twenty to twenty-five first-class, fairly high-end motel properties. A lot of them had cocktail lounges, and some of them had small casinos. For all practical purposes today, I can't count five really outstanding motels on East or West Fourth. I don't think there are any on East Fourth, and there's only a couple left on West Fourth.

The Travelodge, which is now the Desert Rose Motel, was in business when we came to Reno in 1951, and it didn't lose or give up its Travelodge franchise until about five years ago. Business is so bad there, they don't even keep their office open in the evening for travelers to rent rooms. I notice when I go home at five or five-thirty their office is already closed, and says it will open at nine a.m.

So people have kind of given up on Fourth Street, and I think it's even worse on East Fourth than it is on West Fourth. But there isn't much on West Fourth right now to write home about either. You've got to stop and realize also that one of the nicest motels we had in Reno was at Sierra and West Fourth; it was the Daniel's Motor Lodge. The Eldorado bought that and tore it down for parking.

The big properties that are close to Fourth Street, the Eldorado and the Silver Legacy and to some degree the Circus Circus, they have used Fourth Street for things like parking, and they haven't kept any degree of sensitivity as to seeing that West Fourth Street or East Fourth Street survive as viable commercial properties. I don't know what the tax base is as it relates to what it brought in then and what it brings in now, but just between here and the six blocks back to Virginia Street, on West Fourth where we're at

the moment, there are at least seven or eight empty sizable vacant lots or the same size with a closed structure on them.

You have to realize that before the freeway—and the freeway came through about 1970 or '71—before the freeway, everybody coming into Reno from the west came through West Fourth, and that's why I immediately looked at West Fourth when I came to Reno fifty years ago for location, because West Fourth was the feeder into Reno, and, of course, now that is no longer the case, even though some people pull off way out on West Fourth, three miles out, or at the Keystone exit or even to some degree at the Virginia exit. But once the freeway came through, that obviously didn't help. To some degree also, the big properties that I've already mentioned several times were wonderful for Reno, but they were also the downfall and the death blow to a lot of the motel properties.

I could just say simply that there's a lot of nostalgia left with me inasmuch as I remember a West Fourth Street that was vibrant and alive. I will give credit to a few properties, like the Gold Dust West across the street. They've bucked quite a trend in developing and building that casino property. It used to be a couple of strip malls or a strip mall and a small motel called the Wood Motel, right across the street from us. They've done quite well, but they cater, 90 percent or more, to the locals. They're not a tourist draw.

Other than the Gold Dust West and the Gold 'N Silver Coffee Shop next door and this particular building, about the only other viable businesses from here to Virginia Street are really the north side of the Sands, which comes up to Fourth Street, and to some degree the Bonanza, or the Comstock, I think it is, which is still a pretty nice motel. But we're not too far from ghost-town status.

You said to me earlier when we were talking, that at night this particular business, the Chapel of the Bells, stands out really nicely. It's white and it lights up nice at night, it's well lit and it's still somewhat of a draw.

I have to add this, too. The type of clientele that comes to Reno, I hate to say this but it's true, is a whole different clientele than those who get their MasterCard out and fly to Vegas. The clientele we get is the low end of the earning scale. Our weddings come from Susanville and Redding and Roseville and, to some degree, Sacramento, and I feel badly for so many couples. I've had couples come in here that I wanted to buy them a tank of gas because they hardly had the money to get home on. I did a wedding yesterday, and the couple started to leave me a two-dollar tip, and she said, "We better keep that two dollars, honey. We may need it to get home on." I think Reno still draws that financial level of tourist only because they don't have the bucks and the financial ability to really go to Sin City, or Las Vegas.

von Tagen: What are your thoughts about some of the newer tenants and business owners on East Fourth Street? We've got the folks at Lincoln Lounge and the Reno Bike Project. What are your thoughts about those folks?

Flint: Well, I think that you've got some people on East Fourth who are trying real hard. The young guys who bought Louis' Basque Corner are trying to carry on a tradition that Louis and his wife started about thirty years ago. The Lincoln Lounge, that particular business per se, has existed for quite a while under various ownerships and so on. But

there's certainly nothing on East Fourth for the tourists.

Now, my son works as a bartender and kind of an assistant manager at the Halfway Club, which is just about halfway between Virginia Street and Sparks, and it is an Italian restaurant that's been continually in business since 1937, but their business is almost 100 percent locals, and even when we have big weekends like Hot August Night and the Air Races, etc., my son tells me they never see any tourists. There's nothing that really any business on East Fourth can do now, other than to survive off the locals who live in the immediate area or at least live in the Reno-Sparks area.

Another thing I want to say is that almost all the motel properties that are left, particularly on East Fourth, are strictly weeklies and monthlies now, and the few motels that are between me and downtown, this seven-block area, they're advertising weeklies too. None of these motels are successful right now as far as being overnight or vacation motels or one- or two-night stays. They just aren't.

This particular motel right next door to us has a terrible reputation. It's a drug den, and there's not a day goes by, literally, that I don't see the REMSA service or the Reno P.D. or the Fire Department over there hauling people out, drug busts. In so many ways, West Fourth Street's become almost a toilet of Reno activity.

I've even asked myself recently, do I really want to continue to operate Chapel of the Bells at West Fourth? Now, at my age, and I'm just two years short of eighty, at my age I'll probably stay here and continue with the West Fourth location, mainly because I have two granddaughters and two daughters and a son-in-law who are my major help who are on my payroll here. So I think it's our family intention to try to keep this a viable investment, but we would be a lot smarter to be downtown in a location and probably in an empty store building on Virginia Street.

The other wedding chapel that does the most business in Reno right now is the Arch of Reno Wedding Chapel, which is down between First and Second on Virginia. They're ensconced in there with a tattoo parlor on one side and a liquor store on the other, and yet they do pretty good business because they're in the center of Reno. Yet they tell me—and we're pretty good friends back and forth—they tell me that their biggest problem where they are there on Virginia Street is that particularly when the door closes at night and they go home at ten-thirty, they wake up in the morning and it's obvious that people have been sleeping in the doorway and urinating on their glass and their doorway and so on. It's just a sad state of affairs.

What bothers me more than anything else is I don't think any of this had to happen. We just didn't have any entrepreneurial spirit to carry on once the Harrahs and the Smiths, the Harolds Club people and Mr. Harrah, passed on. The downhill for Fourth Street and the core of the city almost started with their demise. In fact, if you look at the wedding business, the last really great year we had was the same year Mr. Harrah passed away, and we've had a downhill shrinkage each year in the marriage industry without exception since that year, 1978.

von Tagen: Absolute best-case scenario, what might Reno look like in ten years, and what would it take to get it there in absolute best of circumstances?

Flint: What would be the best-case scenario? Well, first of all, it's not going to happen unless somebody is motivated to come in here with an entrepreneurial, exploitive,

aggressive attitude. Now, at one point in time, there was conversation—this was a bunch of years back—about Donald Trump doing something in Reno, possibly even on West Fourth. There was even some conversation about him buying the Gold ‘N Silver Coffee Shop next door and maybe even this whole square block, which would have probably included this property.

I have to say this, and I don’t say it with any sarcasm, but Dave Aiazzi, who’s been sitting on the City Council for twelve years and I think has termed-out now, he’s more concerned with bike paths down West Fourth Street so the bicycles have their own lane to peddle through than he is with how many tourists come in here and spend much money.

We had a case of a couple who got married here about three years ago, and it happened to be Air Race weekend. They innocently called the Chamber of Commerce for the names of two or three motels or hotels, and the lady at the Chamber of Commerce said, “Oh, for god’s sakes, don’t come to Reno this weekend. It’s full because of the Air Races.” That very weekend the Silver Legacy had a 30 percent occupancy. So there’s an intelligence lacking, and that’s what bothers me.

Now, the best-case scenario is for the mayor and the RSCVA and the redevelopment people to have a series of seminars and meetings with people like me who have been here for a long time, and pull all our heads together and say, “What could we together do to entice a rebuilding of the core of Reno, including Fourth Street?” Now, Cabela’s, out near Verdi, they got a STAR bond loan. There’s also a STAR bond loan associated with Scheel’s in Sparks. There’s no reason in the world that we couldn’t probably successfully put together a really nice development. It might be kind of like a Western-themed town right within the Fourth Street corridor, something like a downtown Truckee.

I think it’s coming up on almost being too late to do it, but I think it still could be done. But I don’t hear anybody saying, “Let’s do it.” Like I said, and I don’t mean to badmouth my good friend Bob Cashell, but whenever I’ve talked to him, and I’ve mentioned West Fourth Street to him several times, he always kind of pats me on the tush and says, “George, it’s all going to be okay.”

But I don’t think Reno would have ever been what Reno was if there hadn’t been people like Harrah and Ascuaga and the Smith family. There were some others like Conrad Priess and the old man Fitzgerald. They built Reno and they promoted Reno, and they made Reno a place where people won, drinks were nearly free, food was very inexpensive, and I think to have the best-case scenario that you just asked me about, we’ve almost got to go back to that kind of a mentality. Get people here, get some whiskey in them, get them fed cheaply, and then they’re going to want to go out in the casino and play. Now we expect people to come here and stone sober go to the tables and play. Well, it doesn’t work that way.

The biggest single thing that’s sad to me is that Nevada—Vegas and Reno both—were built on high-end entertainment that didn’t cost anything. All you had to do was make a reservation, go to dinner, buy the dinner, buy a few drinks, and you got to see Dolly Parton or Bill Cosby or whoever, Liberace, Nat King Cole, and you didn’t pay anything for that. Now they expect people to come from California and pay \$75 to \$100 just to get in to see Bill Cosby. That means that a couple in Redding, California, who wants to come and see Bill Cosby, the wife and the gentleman and his mom, it’s \$300

just to get in the door. Well, that's not what built Nevada. What we did was we got people here for nothing, and got them happy and relaxed, and then we made money off of them by making them want to gamble.

Another thing I don't see any more is this: it used to be that you'd see photograph after photograph after photograph in the San Francisco papers about people who had hit it big on the slots or on gaming in Reno. The *Sacramento Bee* used to carry all kinds of these advertisements for winners in Reno, and none of that is seen anymore. Now, I notice Ascuaga still does it in the local paper and he still does it to some degree on television, but in reality, almost exclusively the winners are local people because we just don't get that firm, strong, solid tourist base that was the backbone of our industry, of our community for so long.

It doesn't take much imagination as you go to places like the Bonanza out on North Virginia or even downtown at properties in south Reno like the Peppermill, to see that a huge percentage of the clientele are locals. Since we have almost half a million people living here, the locals can carry tourism to some degree or the gaming industry to some degree.

I don't know that I certainly have any particular pattern or recipe. I do know that when we started out in business here, the people who ran the Riverside Hotel then, they came out to see us and they gave us certificates to give every single couple a bottle of champagne, free. All they had to do was visit the casino at the Riverside. And that sort of mentality really did work.

Today it's just the opposite. My son-in-law took his girlfriend out the other day to one of the high-end properties in town here and ordered two Coke and whiskeys, and they were small glasses and they were mostly ice, and the two drinks were \$18. Now, come on, already. The couple in Susanville, California, or Redding or Alturas aren't going to drive to Reno to pay \$18 for two drinks, and that's what we seem to be expecting them to do.

Now, to a great degree, if it wasn't for our convention business, I don't know if we'd even be alive today. I hear now that one of the things they're planning for this summer is at the corner of Commercial Row and Virginia Street, they're going to turn about a block of Virginia Street into a bowling alley. Well, you know, that's terribly questionable, from my perspective. They do it every year. They close the streets for Hot August Nights. They close the streets for the Air Races. They close the streets on the weekends for so many things, and all it does is cripple getting around downtown. I've had motel operators tell me for years that they hate those big weekend celebrations, because once they close Virginia Street, and to some degree they always seem to end up closing it right at Fourth Street, people are so confused as to where to go.

This is an example of it. We have brochures in the courthouse for inexpensive weddings, and there's a map on the back of that brochure, how to get to the chapel. We even highlight the way, and during times when Virginia Street's closed, we highlight coming up Arlington rather than Virginia Street because they can't get through Virginia Street. Just like you can't get through Virginia Street right now north of West Fourth because of the repairs.

Almost without exception, and I don't know what it is, but people look at that map and instead of driving west, they drive east. I have more people calling me sitting out in front of the Nugget in Sparks saying, "We've driven all of Fourth Street and never did find your wedding chapel." That certainly underscores the fact that it's very easy to

confuse the tourist, particularly when you start blockading streets for these high-end promotions. It doesn't have any huge negative impact on the Silver Legacy or the Circus Circus or the Eldorado.

On the other hand, the condition of things in Reno right now are such that it isn't just the Chapel of the Bells that's hurting or some of these motels that have closed their door, and they just tore the Shamrock completely down the other day off East Fourth. Look at the problems the Silver Legacy is having. They've got a note due that's almost \$150 million, and they've been getting a stall or a postponement on that for about three months now, and supposedly they've got till April 30th to come up with some new program.

But when that hotel was built, what, twenty, twenty-five years ago, it was never in anybody's wildest imagination twenty-five years later going to be facing possible foreclosure themselves. So there's the biggest property in Reno, except for the Grand Sierra out by the airport, the biggest single tourist property in Reno is on the verge of bankruptcy and may be forced to close. I think it's a \$142 million obligation that they can't meet.

von Tagen: The RTC has invested some interest in expanding their routes on Fourth Street, the Fourth Street corridor. What do you see as some of the greatest transportation needs on Fourth Street?

Flint: I don't know how to answer that candidly, because I'm not exactly sure what you're really asking me. We've got a good bus service. They stop out here fifteen times a day on this corner, and you mentioned it when we were talking before you turned on your recorder. But I don't really know what the concern is related to transportation. I don't think that has really much to do with the tourism factor. Now, maybe on the other hand, maybe the Visitor Convention Authority has some sort of thinking in their mind that if there was better transportation there'd be more tourists moving about.

I think it's pathetic that for people who come to Reno who stay in the downtown corridor, whether they stay at Harrah's or stay at Silver Legacy, for them to go shopping while they're in Reno is a six-mile drive out to Meadowood Mall. In reality, a lot of people don't come here just to gamble. Yeah, Dad will play poker or blackjack or whatever, but Mom and the kids get tired of the acts at Circus Circus after a while, and a lot of people really do enjoy going shopping. Shopping for people staying in the core of Reno is almost a fifteen-mile roundtrip out to Meadowood Mall and back, and, by the way, a cab drive each way is about \$25.

So one of the things that might be a huge plus for Fourth Street and the core of Reno would be something like the Gray Reid's Department Store that operated here for many years, and they were a good store. They were engulfed by Circus Circus. They were in that property at one point. But we need some really quality family shopping opportunities for people still right within downtown, not six miles or seven miles away south, down South Virginia Street to get out to Meadowood Mall.

I think the closure of the other shopping center, Park Lane—it was only three miles out instead of six—tearing that completely apart, was a mistake. Originally they tore it down because there were proposals to develop a big casino and resort property there which never came to fruition, but that's another thing.

We've had so many people who get married here who say, "Where can we go shopping? There's no shopping in Reno," because nobody has told them we do have a nice shopping center out at Meadowood Mall, but, as I said, it's a \$20 cab ride each way.

I'm sitting here being pretty negative with you, I realize, but my biggest negativity isn't so much what we do or don't have, my biggest negativity, as it relates to principally Fourth Street, is that it doesn't seem to me that anybody gives a damn or has any sort of motivation or vision at all to do anything to recreate, at least to some degree, what Fourth Street once was.

Fourth Street once was the main feeder into Reno right out here about six or eight blocks going west. You had that beautiful log cabin motel; I can't remember the exact name of it now. It was a popular destination place. All the little units were like miniature log cabins. Well, here about ten years ago they tore it all out, and it's been sitting there vacant ever since. So we've got a lot of vacant land. Some of the people, like Donald Trump, who had looked at it and shook their heads and gone the other way, nobody, I guess, sees a whole lot of potential, and that's kind of sad.

von Tagen: Would you like to see parking changed in any way?

Flint: I don't think so. I don't think parking change is going to change a damn thing.

von Tagen: What about issues for pedestrians or bicycles, such as wider sidewalks, or additions of bike lanes.

Flint: Well, those kinds of things can come after you start seeing people come. I've got to tell you that one Saturday I was in San Francisco, and my wife and I went down to Fisherman's Wharf. It wasn't even a particularly nice day, and Reno was in the doldrums that weekend because the weather wasn't very good. We could hardly walk around Fisherman's Wharf because the sidewalks—and they have twelve-foot sidewalks all around there—were so full of people that you could hardly move about, which brings up another point.

I think, and I've got to say it, I think some of the fallacy of promoting Nevada and northern Nevada as the ultimate great destination opportunity is very short-sighted, when you realize that the people who live in California have the Redwoods and Yosemite National Park and Sequoia National Park and San Francisco, which is one of the most unique cities in the world, and Fisherman's Wharf, which by itself is a huge draw. We want these people to come over and see what we have, when, in reality, they have a lot more to offer than we do. Now, we did have the casinos. We did have a corner on that until the Indians started building their casinos, and I think there are now casinos as close as ten and fifteen miles from San Francisco on Indian land.

I respect what you ask me about parking and things like sidewalk improvement and so on, but those things you do when you start seeing the people come back. But just to have wider sidewalks and maybe more parking, hell, you got enough parking right now. There are a couple of parking garages that are almost empty and nonexistent. Fitzgerald's is an example; their parking garage is a ghost town.

I just don't see those things—and I'm being a bit redundant, forgive me—I don't see those things being germane to making Reno hop and jump as it once did because I

think until you entice people with some awfully good opportunities and some wonderful jackpot opportunities and that sort of thing, I don't think the size of the sidewalk or the crosswalk means much at all.

A friend of mine, not a close friend, but I know her well, won \$32 million at the Rail City Casino in Sparks on the Megabucks machine about three years ago. Thirty-three million dollars she took over a twenty-five year period, so she gets like a million dollars a year after taxes. Yet two weeks after that happened, you didn't see one single advertisement about it. That's the kind of thing that makes people want to come to Reno. I know this sounds a little corny, but you used to see in Vegas big, huge signs up the side of a hotel property saying "dollar drinks" and "50-cent shrimp cocktails." You've got to offer people unbelievable deals to make them want to come visit you. They'll appreciate those unbelievable deals and then they'll start gambling in your casino. But when you charge—and I'm being again redundant—when you charge fifteen to twenty bucks for two drinks, all of a sudden you're getting into people's gambling money, because all they're going to gamble in most cases is their extra or their disposable income. You can't take that all away from them and expect them to have anything left to play, and I think that's probably part of the problem that the Silver Legacy is facing. Their rooms are expensive, moderately speaking. They've got high-end restaurants that are expensive, and there isn't really any great motivation to go in there and gamble, and that's what they needed if they were going to survive financially.

von Tagen: Do you have any favorite or special memories about an experience on Fourth Street or in Reno?

Flint: Oh, nothing more than the fact that I can remember when it was real busy. But I've got to take you back forty-five years ago when I had my wedding chapel in Vegas. Even then, even then I would leave the strip in Vegas, drive out to the airport, take a plane to Reno, and head back to the wedding chapel here, and it always made me feel—I don't know whether I want to say nostalgic or depressed, that I just left a place where everything was hopping, and I got back to Reno where you could shoot a 30.06 rifle down the street and not hit anybody.

Reno was built—and I have a favorite story I've got to tell you—Reno was built with a whole different mentality than what built the success of Las Vegas. When I came to Reno and took the little place at 540 West Fourth, it was an antiquated old building. In '62 it was probably seventy-five years old or at least sixty-five years old. I applied for a business license and a Certificate of Occupancy, and for about thirty days the City of Reno harassed the dickens out of me. This wasn't right, that wasn't right, the furnace needed a different firewall around it. We needed a second bathroom. The wiring was antiquated. This wasn't quite up to code. I didn't think I'd *ever* get open.

Three years later I went to Vegas. By that time I had a few bucks in my jeans and a partner who'd come in from out of state who wanted to add some money to the pot. We were going to open a wedding chapel in Vegas, and we found a spot in a property just off the strip in a motel. We were going to lease three motel units, they were large units, and turn it into the Chapel of the Bells on the strip in Vegas. We were just about to sign the lease and I said to my partner, "Wait a minute. Let's go down to the Building Department and find out what their demand list is going to be."

“What do you mean ‘demand list’?”

I said, “Well, when I came to Reno, I almost gave up before I got the right to open a business, because they were so nitpicky with me and so demanding.”

He said, “I understand what you’re saying.”

So we went down to the Building Department and I got this little lady sitting down at a desk in the Las Vegas Business License Department, and I said to her, “Let me tell you what happened to me in Reno. I thought I’d better come talk to you first, because I don’t know what you’re going to demand of me from the standpoint of heating and air conditioning and parking, etc., etc. Why don’t you give me a litany of what your demands are going to be before I sign this lease.”

She said to me—and I was a young man then; I was about thirty—she said, “Listen, young man. We don’t do that. That’s not how we run things in Vegas. You sign that lease and do your best and go ahead and get opened, and we’ll come out sometime in the next three or four or five months and be sure everything’s in order. If it isn’t, we’ll help you bring it up to order.” Then she says, “And, by the way, would you like the mayor to come out for your grand opening?”

Now, that was the difference in the mentality that built Las Vegas compared to what built Reno. Yet because Fourth Street was that corridor that everybody had to come in through to come into Reno, it was only normal that the motels, the wedding chapels, the restaurants would do well, because every car coming into Reno was exposed to it. I can’t be altogether critical of me and the other businesses, inasmuch as the freeway itself changed the complexion of Fourth Street to a great degree. When the freeway opened, our traffic just dried up overnight. So I got to figuring out, “Where they going? What are they up to? Where are people going? I guess they’re driving on down to Virginia Street and getting off.”

So I went up to Keystone and started watching the traffic patterns, and what happened was people were still getting off at Keystone, but there wasn’t anything that directed them to Fourth Street, so a lot of them were driving down to Second Street or clear down to First along the river and making a left turn to get into downtown Reno. At the time, at the corner of Fourth and Keystone, the Palace Club, which is another club that no longer exists—that’s part of the Harrah property now—the Palace Club had a great big huge signboard that just said “Palace Club Downtown Reno,” nicely lit. I knew [Silvio] “Sil” Petricciani, who just passed away recently in his nineties, I knew him enough to call him. I called him and I said, “Mr. Petricciani, would you let me, at my expense, at the top of your sign, all along the top of that big sign, put a forty-foot by three-foot arrow that said turn left for downtown Reno here?”

He said, “Sure.” He said, “I’ll even call Young Sign Company and tell them to do it for you.”

I said, “No, I’ll pay for it.”

He said, “Ah, you’re just a young guy. Let me take care of it for you. What do you want it to say? Left turn for downtown Reno?”

Do you know when that sign went up, all of a sudden our traffic came back? Now, there was a motel that had a circus name, almost like Merry-Go-Round Inn. That wasn’t quite the name, but it was a circus-related name, and they opened up early in the year, like in February. That place sat empty for weeks, and it was embarrassing. Finally, I said to the manager of the place, “I’ll tell you what to do. Go to one of the car

lots in town and rent or buy or borrow about six or eight cars that they don't mind selling for next to nothing, and put them in the parking lot in front of various rooms."

He said, "What's that going to do?"

I said, "It's going to draw the traffic in, and you're going to be a success." And he did it. I think he started out with five old cars he put in there, one here, one here, one here, and, you know, the damn motel started filling up every night. You've got to lead people. You've got to direct people. You've got to help people.

It doesn't help either, as far as Fourth Street goes right now—and I'm just going to use the words crude as I can—the Travelodge, which is now the Desert Rose Inn, is the biggest whorehouse in Reno. The girls live in there and they're working out of there. They're picking up guys and taking them there. You think Mustang Ranch is a big operation. The biggest whorehouse in downtown Reno right now is the old Travelodge. Even up until they switched names and gave up the Travelodge franchise, it was still a damn nice motel, even though it was about sixty years old. It'd been kept up really nice.

I sit here every Saturday and do my thing in between weddings, and I can see right through here, I can see the action on Fourth Street. About three Saturdays back, I counted seventeen street hookers get in and out of cars at this intersection. The police basically do a little raid or a little sting every now and then.

I said to the mayor, I said, "Mayor, why don't you put some signs up about two on every block between here and downtown that say prostitution in the city of Reno is illegal and punishable both to the prostitute or the lady and the client?"

"Oh," he said, "George, that'd make a terrible image."

I said, "It wouldn't make as bad an image as what you got right now." We jokingly call them hooker lookers. There's a group of them. I'll bet there's about there's a thousand of them who routinely pick up girls on Fourth Street. There was one guy with a "Pyramid Lake" license plate in a light green Toyota, and I haven't seen him here for a few weeks, but he'd pick up three and four girls a week. He did it for years. It became almost a joke that he was the leader of the pack, as it were.

But you can talk about street crossings and sidewalk improvement and all that sort of thing. They did put in these new lights. You see the one right there? Above the stop sign? They put those in about five or six years ago, old-fashioned-appearing lamps, and that did kind of doll the street up. I'm inclined to think if they were to hang flower baskets like they do on South Virginia or on Virginia Street, if they were to hang flower baskets off those lights and maybe have some nice, well-maintained sitting areas like bus bench areas, I'm inclined to think it would be a plus and a positive for Fourth Street.

I said this already, but I'll say it again, where Fourth Street today is, is almost a natural happening when you turn the number-one feeder street into just another street by having the freeway come through and cut it off. So to some degree it was bound to happen. We would not survive on Fourth Street if it wasn't for our Internet visibility and our brochures in the courthouse, because 75 percent of our business comes off the Internet and our brochures and with some of the motel properties that work with us, and that wasn't the case fifty years ago. Fifty years ago, you could depend on the fact that just the traffic coming into Reno would pull a lot of business off Fourth Street into our parking lot.

We had one Fourth of July—I'll never forget it—it was about the first year this chapel was open Labor Day and we still had the one at 540 open Labor Day, and we did

168 weddings in these two properties on a weekend.

One hundred sixty-eight couples were married in the two properties on a weekend. Now we consider just with this property alone if we do twenty-five weddings on a weekend, we're tickled to death. But, of course, much of that is the fact that the market is terribly shrunk or smaller than what it was during those glory years.

von Tagen: Is there anything else you'd like to add that you felt you didn't get a chance to say?

Flint: No.

von Tagen: Well, thank you so much for sitting with me, George. It was wonderful hearing you talk.

Flint: Well, it's a bit bitchy, I realize. I think that this property, this corner, which I was offered about ten years ago a million dollars for, I don't know that I could sell this corner today for any more than 250,000, even with this nice building on it. Some of that's the economy. It's not just Fourth Street's evolution or backwards evolution.

I think the biggest single thing is that I don't see any monied interests that have any motivation to do much about either Fourth Street or really the core of Reno. Stop and think about the fact that one of the nicest motels in town is right smack dab across the street from the Silver Legacy, and it's the Thunderbird Motor Lodge. They have now put up a wrought iron fence there, and except on weekends they don't even keep the place open anymore. They lock the gate so you couldn't even pull in there if you wanted to.

Now, our tax base has been badly hurt by the shrinkage in gaming and other tourism-related matters, but because the population has increased during that thirty-year period of downturn, the property taxes and the other spending from instead of it being a county with 200,000 people, it's a county now of over 400,000, that's made up for much of it.

It kind of bothers me—and I do want to say this, and I like Governor Brian Sandoval a lot, we've been friends a long time—I admire the fact that they want to diversify our economy with other things than tourism, but every other city in the United States is trying to do that same damn thing. We had one advantage over all of them. We had a rip-roaring gambling destination, and yet we don't seem to have any motivation to reinvent that wheel or to re-exploit that one advantage. I mean, everybody's got a pretty place to go to. Everybody's got some plus. But we had an extra huge plus in that we had gaming available to northern Californians.

I think, to some degree it's a bit of a cop-out to blame it all on the Indians, because you know what? For years I've heard it said that we can't compete with Vegas, but, you know, we could've competed with the Indians. We haven't tried to. I don't know what the story is on the Indian casinos now. Some of them I think you still can't buy liquor in them, and a lot of them don't have destination facilities like rooms. I don't think they've ever really tried to feature entertainment at the level that Vegas and Reno did, and to some degree they haven't had to. Their very presence has worked for their general betterment.

On another line, the Foxborough casino area in Massachusetts was one of the

most successful Indian destinations for the last twenty-five or thirty years. Suddenly, their economy has collapsed. It used to be that every member of the tribe got a sizable monthly check, and that's been completely cut off. I think that's just the economy.

It's kind of sad in the fact that part of Reno's problem isn't our lack of vision or isn't the fact that we haven't had a Bill Harrah to promote Reno. A certain amount of what we have left and our lethargy, as far as exploiting the area, is directly tied to the economy. California has 10 percent of the country's population. Californians today are collecting one-third of all welfare monies from the federal level on down. So here we have a state with 10 percent of the total population of the United States, and yet they're getting one-third of all the welfare. That includes food stamps and everything else. So the economy has additionally been a huge slap in the face to us.

There's a motel on North Virginia that used to be called the Orleans and I think it's a Super 8 now. It's up there almost across from Lawlor Events Center. I pass that every morning and every night when I go home, and it almost makes me cry that most mornings when I come by at eight o'clock, and that's about an eighty-room motel, they're lucky if they've got six cars in the place.

Now, we've still got some things to offer, but we've got to get together and figure out how to make people want to come enjoy those, and one of the first things we have to do if they're going to enjoy it is to clean it up. It just looks like a real, unfortunately, not very attractive tourist destination.

von Tagen: Well, thank you so much.