

THE SPIRIT MOUNTAIN CASINO FEATURE ISSUE

Stories by Chris Mercier

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER HAS BEEN THERE SINCE THE BEGINNING

■ Ty Huff used to wrestle other wrestlers, now he grapples with the bottom line.



Photo by Brent Merrill

TY HUFF



You can take the gaming, the dining, the ambience, the customer service and really just about any facet of Spirit Mountain and find one common link — constantly reinventing the business and pursuing economic self-sufficiency for the Tribe by making money.

It's simple, really. Millions of dollars flow in and out of the casino week by week and a significant portion of the cash choosing to remain finds a purpose in drawing more of its kind in the door.

"You can't stop and quit putting money into this business," said Ty Huff, Spirit Mountain Casino's Chief Financial Officer. "If you do, it's gonna die."

And watching the casino die probably doesn't sit high on Huff's list, especially since he is one of the few people who have been here since its inception in 1995. He came on originally as a corporate controller whose duties included managing accounts receivable, financials

and purchasing.

As CFO nowadays he can summarize his duties easily, "I protect the assets of the company." Mainly, he oversees the flow and distribution of money throughout the casino, leaving not one red penny unaccounted for. Sounds like a pretty general duty, yet Huff toils roughly 50 hours per week, a number he hopes to cut back on with another child on the way.

Huff is homegrown material, born in Eugene, college at Oregon State University in Corvallis, and presently he lives in Salem. You can call Huff a family man. Fittingly, he met his wife, Susan, six years ago at the casino. Their son, Scott, is six years old.

An OSU alumnus, Huff received his Bachelor's in Business 10 years ago. His career in business began with Isley & Company, the auditing company that still works with CTGR to this day.

One thing that most people immediately notice about Huff is his stout build, a quality that most people guessed would have made him a wrestler at one point and when asked the question, he affirmed it.

"Oh in high school it was a blast," Huff, a graduate of Sprague High School in Salem, said. "But in college they were very determined, very competitive...in fact, too competitive."

The fact that he wrestled for OSU, an elite program under Coach Dale Thomas, probably accounted for that.

"The practices were crazy," he said, reflecting. "People (teammates) were psychotic."

College wrestling was short-lived for Huff, but he still remembers fondly the high school years, for the sport induced a sense of discipline in him that carries on to this day. He wrestled in the 157 lb. class and barely missed the state tournament his senior year.

Though he loved the sport, and the competition, many of the extreme physi-

cal aspects of wrestling wore him down. Any wrestler can vouch for the harrowing physical regimen and what bothered Huff the most was the weight cutting. As strength advantage plays such a large role in the success of a wrestler, many in the sport engage in the draining practice of fasting before a meet, the result being that they would lose sufficient poundage to compete in a lower weight class. Some wrestlers are rumored to drop more than 10 lbs only days before a meet.

"I didn't like that," he said. "Some guys would cut 10 to 12 pounds before meets, and when you compete, man...you're hurting."

Huff is a Certified Rescue Diver. SCUBA diving has been his prime pastime for years now (when he has the time). And his diving adventures have taken him to some famous aquatic venues, including some Puget Sound locations, Maui and the Channel Islands near Santa Barbara.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, no encounters with the ocean's celebrities (Orcas, Great Whites) have manifested themselves yet, but Huff has seen some impressive underwater denizens like octopi and wolf eels.

Huff clearly likes his job and considering how much time he puts in every week that must clearly be a good thing at least for sanity's sake. When he sets foot every day inside those doors, a whole new realm opens up, the abode of casino management, and Ty Huff has a good share of insight for those curious about such things.

"You learn a lot here," he said. "You learn to work with a lot of different people, a lot of personalities."

Huff said the enjoyable atmosphere that pervades the casino has changed little since he came on board.

According to Huff, many of the original crew realizes that Spirit Mountain remains a pretty sweet situation.

"People leave, and then they come back, and a lot of people say they didn't know what they had until they left," he said. "They really appreciate it when they come back."

And contrary to a popular notion, the exodus of Bruce Thomas, the Executive Officer until last year, and the arrival of Michael Moore to replace him has altered little the inner workings of Spirit Mountain.

Spirit Mountain Casino is the biggest tourist attraction in Oregon.

Spirit Mountain is the best casino in the Northwest, Huff said, and with the kind of conviction to make one suspect he believes it. And yet he has that slightly cynical approach, call it realistic maybe, that tells him vigilance is the key to success, and that success itself has no set formula.

"Change. Man, you have got to do it," he said referring to the constant nature of the business.

He pointed out how Spirit Mountain engaged in the extremely un-Vegas practice of investing in nickel slot machines, years ago considered an inside joke by the industry. And now, of course, nickel machines are a reliable source of revenue for many Indian casinos, and Vegas has become replete with them ("They're all over the place now").

Deviations such as Chris Isaak back in July of 1999 have also helped. Huff said he'd never seen so many new faces before.



Photo by Brent Merrill

LIKE AN ATHLETE, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY COVERS ALL THE BASES

■ Karen "The Glue" Realander keeps everything balanced, together.



Photo by Peta Tinda

KAREN REALANDER



People are likely to wonder how some of the casino's executives are able to balance out the infinite meetings, duties and at the same time maintain an

open line of communication between one another. The answer is simple, Karen Realander — AKA "The Glue."

"No matter what you ask her to do," Huff said. "She does it. She makes everything happen."

Realander laughed when I told her about Huff's analogy. The nickname she has for herself is "the mole," not in any way related to the ABC reality show involving a traitor amidst a trusting group, but more as a person who pops up periodically in all phases of the casino.

The official title for Realander is Executive Secretary. If secretary conjures up images of a young woman, bright-eyed and taking calls and appointments from behind a desk, then in most regards that is a fairly concise description. But by no means is Realander desk-bound, and I can personally attest to that because a whole two weeks were consumed in the act of phone tag just to secure an interview with her.

"As secretary, most of what I do involves working with the whole executive team," she said. "That includes coordinating meetings, keeping tabs on

departmental managers, and facilitating communication."

Realander came to Oregon in 1995, from the state known for snow, lingo and a wrestler-turned-governor — Minnesota. Yes, like Huff, she was also a part of the inaugural casino crew, though in Human Resources and Payroll.

She is 31 years old and lives in McMinnville with her husband Jeff. She has one daughter, Megan, only three years old and two stepsons.

Work she defines as "challenging, some days," citing communication as the ever present "big issue." Realander feels lucky to have witnessed the evolution of Spirit Mountain during its six years of existence, acknowledging that only the facilities have fluctuated and not the dynamics.

Politics here are fairly tame compared to her previous casino experience, Mystic Lake where before moving to Oregon she worked for the Payroll Department. Mystic Lake is the casino of the Little Six Tribe.

Realander likes her situation, having no plans to go anywhere else anytime

soon. Her "pretty nice schedule" allows more time to the old family tradition of scrapbook making, the only other hobby she engages in aside from spending time with the kids.

Though now six years an Oregonian, Realander does wonder how much time will pass before she begins to feel like one. That Minnesota lifestyle and Scandinavian blood run deep in her veins. She admitted to having an accent embarrassingly similar to that parlayed into immortality by Frances McDormand in the dark comedy *Fargo*.

"Yeah, I talked like that," she said. "I used to say 'Or-uh-gone.' And I used to say 'Uf Daah!'"

A true Midwesterner, Realander still wonders when her next adventure in icefishing will occur, as much a part of a Minnesota upbringing as puddle-splashing is to Oregonians. Probably not until she goes back.

"I'm only finally beginning to realize just how much more laid back Oregonians are," she said.