

I Preach, Therefore I Am



Justin Doucette, Food Management Professional, Coyote Café at the MGM Grand and Chairman of Nevada Restaurant Association

Those of you who know me personally realize that I can be, at times, a bit of a preacher. The only problem was, until I was elected chairman of the Nevada Restaurant Association, I have not had any sort of soapbox from which to preach. But now, loyal friends and even more loyal enemies, I have my soapbox. I will preach in each issue of Nevada Hospitality (with distribution in the thousands) in my little corner, "From the Chair" (with readership in the tens).

In my efforts to become the elected chair and obtain this highly coveted soapbox, I ran a moderately clean campaign, planting subtle seeds that changes in the association would accompany my tenure. It was a grueling campaign, despite the fact that there were no other candidates who expressed interest. I squeaked out a victory, winning by just a single vote, against a worthy competitor whom I like to call "None of the Above."

Looking back, I frankly don't care how I ascended through the rat race to lead this association. I don't even care if anyone wants to hear me on my soapbox. In fact, it's my soapbox and I will say

what I darn well please, thank you very much.

What I do care about is keeping promises I made to change the way the association thinks and acts in regards to its members, its staff, its board of directors and its importance (or lack thereof) in modern food and beverage society. It is not irrelevant that these promises were made to no one but myself.

And so change we will — like it or not. You can't see them or touch them, but I hope you will begin to feel and experience the changes already being implemented. Following are two shining examples of changes in the design of the association:

The Board: With the help of Karen Dorsey, our board is becoming more vibrant than seen in recent years. Directors without the time, skills or desire to serve effectively have been asked to resign. New directors are constantly being sought. Brad Brennan, although shy and reclusive, has taken the helm of our marketing and public relations committee and will oversee a significant monetary investment in marketing efforts. Our governmental affairs committee has kicked into a faster pace with more accountability and exposure planned. Our board has more diversity and greater emphasis on individuality than I have personally witnessed in my many years with the association. In fact, I take personal pride from a board meeting earlier this year in which two members voted against separate issues that each felt strongly about. Not a big feat, you say? Think again. Past experience shows that most of the board issues are agreed-upon unanimously or, at most, we hear one "no" vote in any given meeting. The fact that we had two "no" votes on two separate issues (from persons previously serving the board as chairman) shows that the issues being considered are quite important to the association and worthy of board dissention. In my opinion, the more "no" votes, the merrier!

The Allied Committee: Lorri Davidson, who so nobly restored the hot-food competition to the Las Vegas International Hotel & Restaurant Show several years ago, has joined the board of directors and serves as chairperson of the newly-formed allied committee. The primary purpose of this committee is to create a member-discount program. This program is designed to market allied members who provide discounts and other incentives to restaurant members. Out of our hundreds of allied members, only a couple dozen have seized the opportunity to participate in the first wave of our discount program. Rest assured, fellow Allied Members — the Nevada Restaurant Association will continue to promote the use of all allied members by restaurant members. Member discount program participants, however, will receive some additional marketing exposure to advertise their incentives. I urge all allies to consider joining this program, whether you join now or in the near future, as the program validates itself. The entire board looks forward to Lorri's success.

Stay tuned. There's more soapbox preaching to come!