

Interactive entertainment DESIGN STIRS ROADRUNNER

The contemporary standard of beauty in Las Vegas, from the standpoint of the residents and tourists alike, almost demands interactive counterparts. It doesn't matter whether the location is a restaurant or a retail store, bar or supermarket. People expect special effects and lighting, even if the property is a small local casino.

Michael Corrigan, vice president of Corrigan Investments, realized this when he began work on the Roadrunner Casino, located at 745



South Boulder Highway in Henderson. From the property's conception, Corrigan spearheaded a team of design specialists faced with the challenge of creating an authentic Old West atmosphere with the contemporary counterparts of Las Vegas neon and gaming.

"Our goal for the Roadrunner Casino was to make it the flagship of our other Roadrunner properties in Henderson," says Corrigan, referring to the Roadrunner Saloon on East

Stewart and Roadrunner Saloon Sunrise on East Lake Mead. "To do it, we were willing to invest in the property to make it memorable and unique."

To assist Corrigan Investments in the project, Corrigan hired NBBJ, the second largest architectural firm in the United States and fifth largest in the world. Surprisingly, NBBJ wasn't hired for its long, impressive list of credentials. Corrigan, a hands-on operator, selected the international firm, with offices in Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Columbus, New York, and Research Triangle Park, based on his own impression of their work.

"While I was on a business trip in Utah, I paid a visit to the Factory Outlet Mall in St. George," says Corrigan. "When I noticed Polo's Old West identity and found the design flawless, I knew spending the next few days tracking down the designers would be worth it."

The search led Corrigan to Craig Hardman at NBBJ's Seattle offices. Hardman had directed the design team responsible for the outlet store and accepted Corrigan's challenge to create a unique casino theme that was reminiscent of the Old West, interactive, and could create a lasting impact on patrons.

"With Polo, the store that prompted Michael Corrigan to call us, our challenge was to take the common thread — the standard attitude of Polo — and adapt it to the character-

istics of the region and the mall itself," said Hardman. "Designing the Roadrunner was a similar challenge. On one hand, we wanted to create an establishment with an Old West theme. On the other, we were in Las Vegas, where glitter and neon are commonplace."

The solution offered by NBBJ was to create a Southwest theme with all the beauty of the open outdoors, all the rustic attractiveness of the Old West, and all the vibrancy of Las Vegas. As the cornerstone, the most unusual aspect of the casino would be a curved bar with a thunder cloud overhead. In addition, rain, thunder and lightning would emanate from the thunder cloud any time a patron hit a jackpot.

"The Roadrunner Casino was an uncommon project because it goes beyond the lighting effects you see in the movies," said Nemco's Arnie Larson. "Everything has to stand up to the scrutiny of three dimensions."

Nemco, a national custom lighting design company that has worked with clients such as Walt Disney, took on the task of finding and designing some of the lighting design solutions. Since NBBJ's theme included different phases of the light sky, Nemco would have to present what lighting elements could help create the Old West and outdoor feeling.

"Michael Corrigan had a commitment to make the casino as authentic as possible," says Larson. "But

in some cases, the historic items we would have liked to use were not available."

In the dining area of the Roadrunner, the wagon wheel chandeliers look authentic. In truth, while antique wagon wheels would have been preferable, they were too small to provide enough lighting. Following Corrigan's guidelines, the company built a bigger wagon wheel and then literally "beat it up" until the wheel looked as if it might have crossed the Oregon trail.

"It's not as easy as that - just beating it up," says Larson. "You have to choose the right materials - wood and metals that look rustic - build it, and then give it enough wear to make it authentic without destroying the fixture."

The wagon wheel chandeliers were not the only area for impressive lighting design. The general lighting throughout the casino is extremely modern in performance, but rustic in appearance. By using natural metals and creating life-sized silhouettes, an old west barn at twilight took shape in the dining area. Above the bar, glass rods filled with shattered glass reflect light, creating the appearance of rain under the storm cloud.

"The customers are the real test of any property," said Larson. "Corrigan was extremely supportive in allowing us to raise the level of creativity we needed to ensure the customers would appreciate the detail."

The lighting throughout the casino wasn't the only area where detail was demanded. John Rizzotto of Faux Paws Painting, a custom painting and exotic surfaces specialist, was hired to assist in ensuring even the paint and stains would create a warm, friendly, fun place to frequent.

"Michael Corrigan's uncompromising vision and commitment to quality cannot be praised enough," says Rizzotto. "From the exterior landscaping to the wood floors to the

ceiling panels that we toned and distressed to imply age, there were countless details that many project managers would have called insignificant."

Although time consuming, Rizzotto's company developed a five-coat painting process to make the Roadrunner appear as if it was out of time. After researching color combinations and colors of different decades, Rizzotto applied five coats of paint and then sanded them away, paying careful attention to the areas that would actually be worn with frequent use.

The paints and stains, together with a collection of authentic antique items from the Old West, which Corrigan himself secured by making contacts across the Southwest, would create the atmosphere required for the most interactive portion of the casino - the rain cloud.

To complete this task, Corrigan secured Dan Comins of Interactive Technologies to create a "real time" thunder and lightning show. Corrigan selected this company because, unlike most production studios, they bring high-tech computers to the location and then produce the desired lighting and sound effects. This allows the client to play a key role in the effects, rather than just listen to a finished product and then have it sent back with changes and additional studio time costs.

"We could have made the lightning show go off every 45 minutes or had the lights change like the Forum Shops," said Comins. "But, after customer research, we found the customers would be distracted from enjoying the casino. Designing the lightning storm to be integrated with a player's jackpot has really paid off."

"When we decided to build this project," says Corrigan, "we wanted to prove that locals wanted the same level of attention and interactive entertainment that is enjoyed by Las Vegas vacationers." **lv**

