

Nevada tourism conference focuses on changing industry

A panel of top hotel executives and gaming experts will address the changing hospitality industry and their strategic plans for 2011 at the Nevada Governor's Conference on Tourism next week.

The panel consists of John Farahi, co-chairman and CEO of Monarch Casino Resort Inc.; Jonathan Halkyard, senior vice president and CFO of Caesars Entertainment Corporation; Bill Hughes, director of marketing operations of the Peppermill Resort Spa Casino; and Ryan Sheltra, general manager of the Bonanza Casino.

Panelists will discuss how their properties have diversified over the years to meet the changing needs and desires of visitors, as well as their plans for 2011.

The conference, produced by Nevada Commission on Tourism, opens Dec. 7 with the quarterly tourism commission meeting, followed by the first General Session at 1pm. The General Session will address the economic outlook for Nevada's target markets. It will look at the factors that travelers must weigh when deciding to travel and how those factors affect decision-making.

Two afternoon sessions follow the General Session, both aimed at learning how to better communicate with travelers and set one's destination apart from the rest. Bill Siegel, CEO of Longwoods International, will present "Rules of Engagement," a session on how to connect with visitors on an emotional level and increase business through customer interaction. A panel of marketing executives from throughout Nevada will discuss the tools to communicate with travelers. Jennifer Cunningham of the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority, Cathy Tull

of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority and NCOT's JoLyn Laney will share how they target visitors and shift their communications based on needs of the markets.

The General Session on Dec. 8, will start with two representatives from Google to discuss "new media" and how to allocate advertising dollars to the appropriate media channels to reach visitors where they consume information. This session will be immediately followed by a presentation on the status of international travel by the U.S. Travel Association.

Afternoon sessions include an update on what's ahead for the air-travel industry; measuring return on investment in advertising; and the use of members-only sales websites.

Wednesday's lunch program will include a special presentation to former Sen. Richard Bryan, who was governor when the Nevada Commission on Tourism was created. Bryan and the 1983 Nevada Legislature designated a fraction of the state room tax to be spent on tourism promotion, thus creating the tourism agency and its self-perpetuating budget to increase travel to the state.

The conference will be held at the Peppermill Resort Spa Casino in Reno. Registration is available online and onsite. Visit the website for a full agenda and information on keynote speakers.