

Canada's Premier Gaming Industry Magazine

CANADIAN
GAMING



BUSINESS

Vol. 1 No. 6

June/July 2007

First Nations Gaming

Still Growing after 11 Years

Inside:

Lottery and Gaming Executive 'Town Hall'

Ontario Bingo Reform

WTO Internet Gambling Dispute

Photo courtesy of Ontario Tourism's A. Speed

CANADIAN
GAMING
SUMMIT

April 29 - May 1, 2008 - please visit www.canadiangamingsummit.com for details

Gordon Mackay

Partner, Mackay | Wong Strategic Design

BY AARON TODD



IF GORDON MACKAY ever needs to remember where his firm got started, all he needs to do is go downstairs.

The 41-year-old Toronto resident started Mackay | Wong Strategic Design with partner Ron Wong in 1992, just a year after he received his Master's of Architecture from Dalhousie University. They opened their Toronto office on Blue Jays Way, and the first job they landed was just one floor down from their offices, designing Wayne Gretzky's restaurant. Mackay goes by that restaurant every day on his way to work, but the firm's business focus has expanded beyond restaurants to include gaming facilities.

The firm got its start in the gaming industry with a few small food and beverage projects at Casino Rama in 1999, and as the years have gone by, their gaming business has grown to include every aspect of gaming facilities.

"We've graduated from being where we just sort of inserted a food and beverage unit in a gaming property to being a key strategic part of the master planning of a new facility, and that's where the real joy is," Mackay said. "We can actually consider the guest experience from the minute they open the door to the minute they leave so that every aspect of hospitality and gaming and retail is by our hand. And what you get in that case is a really cohesive, well-considered branding experience."

While the company's background was in restaurant design, it didn't take Mackay long to understand the fundamental concepts of designing gaming properties. During his first gaming gig at Casino Rama, Mackay learned about the whole gaming experience, instead of simply focusing on the food and beverage areas. What struck him more than anything was the 24-hour use that gaming properties demand of their facilities.

"Food and beverage has to be ready to serve a guest as well in the morning as it does at night or on the weekend," Mackay said. "The kind of stress that a 24-hour facility plays on these spaces affects the kinds of materials that you select. They've really got to be bulletproof because they're used full time and they're used longer than anything on the street is typically used."

Mackay's first work on the actual gaming floor came at Ajax Downs, an Ontario Lottery and Gaming racino near Toronto, in early 2005. The firm just completed one of its largest gaming projects, helping Casino Windsor renovate, expand and transform itself into a Caesars property. [Under a licensing agreement between OLG and Harrah's Entertainment, Casino Windsor will become Caesars Windsor early in 2008.]

Before the Caesars licensing agreement was signed, Mackay | Wong was tasked with designing a 750-seat buffet, and later was hired to design a major public space called the Rotunda that included an upscale lounge and lobby bar. Once the decision was made to brand the casino as a Caesars property, the firm was poised to be a major player in that effort.

"As you can imagine, this changed our design course dramatically," Mackay said. "We found ourselves in the lead strategic position to collaboratively guide the facility's branding transformation with Harrah's, OLG and Casino Windsor." And while Caesars

ce in Las Vegas is already an established id, Harrah's knew that replicating the Vegas sars in Windsor wouldn't work.

They've been working really hard on g to understand what the core value of the sars brand experience is," Mackay said. "We pened to be in the right place at the right e and we've worked with them on how to fine what it means to walk onto a Caesars erty that's not in Las Vegas. They were ang for a much more contemporary way to sport the Caesars imagery."

Mackay certainly knows how to build a id. He helped the Hard Rock Café expand and in Canada, starting in 1995. The y worked on new locations in Vancouver, ilder, Edmonton, Calgary, Banff, Kanata, awa and Niagara, and helped renovate ting Hard Rocks in Toronto, including at Skydome, and in Montreal.

The unique aspect of (the Hard Rock Café ansion) was the concept we proposed to an element of a regional theme to each tion," Mackay said. "As a result every

Canadian location shared its core 'Hard Rock' design values, but we also had the freedom to make each experience unique through a celebration of local musical influences, regional history and distinct cultural influences."

Mackay also worked on designing the Rain Forest Café concept, and those experiences in the firm's early years helped the team learn how to fully develop a customer's experience.

"What happens on a gaming floor in a casino is not unlike what happens in a restaurant," Mackay said. "You're welcomed, you're entertained and you're essentially being offered a memorable experience."

There are two different types of gaming facilities that try to deliver that memorable experience, Mackay believes, and in order to be successful, they need to go about it in different ways.

Some gaming facilities are destination properties with little or no local competition, like Casino Rama. Or they're in a competitive market like Casino Windsor, which fights for market share with three casinos across the

border in Detroit. Isolated destination resorts need to be more universal, Mackay said, because "if you overly commit to themes on the gaming floor, (the players) will tire of them." Facilities in competitive markets, however, need to differentiate their gaming floors with strong themes because people can make choices among several properties.

No matter what kind of property he's dealing with, Mackay knows that if he lands a gaming project, it will be demanding. But he welcomes that challenge.

"The one thing the gaming environment really affords us is a creative backdrop to play with unique ideas and experiment with materials," Mackay said. "The stress and timelines are something we thrive on. We've been in the hospitality business for 15 years with hotels and resorts, so in some ways we're sort of suckers for punishment." ■

Aaron Todd is a gaming industry reporter based in suburban Boston for Casino City Times, www.casinocitytimes.com.



Hospitality



Leisure



Tourism

Lyle Hall and Robert Scarpelli have been providing consulting and advisory services to the Canadian and International hospitality, leisure and tourism industries for over 15 years.

Areas of specialization:

Gaming

Lodging

Attractions

Travel and Tourism

Public Assembly Venues

Recreation and Sports



HLT Advisory Inc.
384 Adelaide St. W. Suite 200
Toronto, ON M5V 1R7
(416) 924-7737
www.hlta.ca

Please contact us: lylehall@hlta.ca
robertscarpelli@hlta.ca