


Where will we find

 [Back to Article](#)

 [Click to Print](#)



Wednesday, Sep. 23, 2009

How One Giant Casino Could Turn Around Vegas

By T. R. Witcher / Las Vegas

There were no Cirque du Soleil acrobats pirouetting around the ceiling. No celebrity red carpeteers. No Happiest Mayor — a nickname for Las Vegas gladhander Oscar Goodman — cavorting about his city, a showgirl on either hip. Just a day when economically troubled Sin City began offering thousands of jobs to people hungry for them.

The catalyst is MGM-Mirage's much anticipated CityCenter, an \$8.5 billion complex of shops, condos and boutique hotels that is set to open in December. Designed by a klatch of world-renowned architects and anchored by a 4,000-room hotel casino, the new resort is hiring 12,000 people in what Michael Peltyn, CityCenter's vice president of human resources, describes as the "single biggest hiring opportunity in the history of the U.S." It sort of needs to be, given that the unemployment rate in Nevada is a formidable 13.2%. The company has already offered 4,000 of those jobs to current MGM employees (95% of whom accepted). And on Monday, Sept. 21, it started to process the remainder — all previously vetted. In total, to fill the 12,000 positions, CityCenter fielded 160,000 applications. ([See pictures of hard times in Las Vegas.](#))

About 500 applicants arrived on the first day of what is likely to be a multiweek procedure. They gathered in a large, nondescript shed, sandwiched between Interstate 15 and the rear end of the Mirage. Despite the occasional muffled burst of applause or cheering from the back of the giant room, it was hardly the exuberant chaos Las Vegas is known for. The atmosphere was more like an agreeable visit to the Department of Motor Vehicles. But it was pure Vegas in its methodical choreography. An army of MGM-Mirage employees, bedecked in navy blue CityCenter polos and khakis, effortlessly squired the prospective hires from station to station, where they receive their job offers and made arrangements for ID badges and uniform fittings. Meanwhile, reporters and photographers, with p.r. docents bolted to their hips, followed close behind. All were surrounded by banners, flat screen TVs, holographic pictures and models conveying the scope of their new place of employment; at one point Janet Jackson's "All for You" drifted by from hidden speakers. ([Read Joel Stein's cover story "Less Vegas."](#))

The new hires came from Vegas and beyond — from New York City, from L.A., from small-town Ohio. They've come to be salon receptionists, bellmen, pit clerks, spa managers. Deborah Peterson, 38, had been out of work

Copyright © 2009 Time Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.

since April 2008. She was laid off from Mandalay Bay, where she used to work as a linen supervisor, tasked with making sure the napkins at use in the resort's many restaurants were adequately stocked and properly maintained. Since then? "Looking for work and looking for work. I put in anywhere from 50 to 100 applications every week." Her unemployment ran out in July, and she took a job working security, trying to support two kids. The work doesn't pay much, and she's fallen behind on her mortgage.

But she got a job on Monday and she's starting as a linen attendant in December. "I enjoy the textiles and knowing the difference between a nice spun polyester and a full-cotton product or Egyptian cotton. I'm so excited. I don't know what to do. When does December get here?"

It's the question Las Vegas has been asking itself since the \$8.5 billion project was first announced in 2004, and it's taken on greater urgency after the city was pummeled by the recession. Two casinos sit half-built on the Vegas strip. Neighborhoods are dotted with foreclosure signs. ([See 10 things to do in Las Vegas.](#))

The scale of CityCenter is unique even in an oversized environment such as Las Vegas. "In good times we've had states fall all over themselves to try to get that kind of economic activity," says MGM-Mirage senior vice president Alan Feldman. "We'd be happy as a community to have someone do a \$100 million tower." The project, however, has been plagued by mishaps: construction-worker deaths, a near bankruptcy, and defects at one tower, the Harmon, that resulted in plans to lop off its upper 21 stories. Meanwhile, the hiring is taking place as indicators across the city remain poor: room inventory is up slightly, but occupancy is off 6% vs. last year; room rates are off at least 25%. But MGM-Mirage says the project is in good shape. The company is carrying \$1.8 billion in debt on the project but says financing to complete it is in place. MGM-Mirage also says it has closed on about half of the 2,440 condos for sale and has collected \$350 million in deposits.

CityCenter could mark the much hoped-for resurgence of Las Vegas, but then again, it might mark the end of an era, a sort of peak the city won't easily reach again. Owing in part to wobbly credit markets, Feldman doesn't think another project of this size will be completed in the city for at least a decade. ([See pictures of Las Vegas.](#))

But as it rises, the frayed spirits of Las Vegas have risen too, at least a little. "You see it on the freeway — its stature is just ridiculous," says Marc Beltran, 24, who just got hired as a front-service bellman. "It's one of the nicest hotels, not only in Las Vegas but in the country, if not the world. Regardless of the rough economy, I think we'll still be successful."

[See TIME's Pictures of the Week.](#)

[See the Cartoons of the Week.](#)

 Click to Print

Find this article at:

<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1925554,00.html>
