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**Las Vegas SUN**

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February 27, 2004

## **Figures in Venetian contest-rigging land at Indian casino**

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LAS VEGAS SUN

Two of the casino executives fired by the Las Vegas Strip's Venetian resort for their involvement in the rigging of three 2002 promotional contests are still working in the casino business.

Former Senior Vice President of Operations Michael French is now chief operating officer for the Inn of the Mountain Gods casino and travel center, in Mescalero, N.M., and former Vice President of Marketing Brian Parrish is director of marketing at the same New Mexico casino.

Nevada gaming regulators said policy prevented them from including the names of The Venetian executives who participated in rigging the February 2002 contests in the complaint and stipulated settlement the Gaming Control Board reached with The Venetian on Wednesday.

The settlement, including unrelated violations, requires the property to pay \$1 million in fines and expenses.

The Venetian also declined to provide the names of what it called "rogue employees who violated company policy and ethical standards," it said in a statement.

But Albert Apodaca, executive director of the Mescalero Apache Tribal Gaming Commission, said Thursday that French and Parrish are two of the four executives The Venetian fired in the aftermath of the rigged contests, and that the Mescalero Apache tribe hired both to key employee positions at the Inn of the Mountain Gods.

French and Parrish were hired at the end of 2002, and Apodaca said both informed the Mescalero Apaches about their involvement in the contest-rigging scheme, and that the Mescalero Apache Tribal Gaming Commission was fully informed about the duo's actions that resulted in their terminations.

"We do full background checks, and I contacted the Nevada Gaming Control Board and also talked to the agents investigating the case," Apodaca said.

The tribal commission decided to license French and Parrish because the panel members believed their involvement in the contest-rigging scheme was more than offset by their wide-ranging experience.

"Plus, the big reason I was able to approve (of their licensing) is that there was no personal gain," Apodaca said. "Besides, it's my understanding, from what I've heard talking to other Las Vegas (operators), that what they did is a common practice there."

French and Parrish were warned that the Mescalero Apaches wouldn't tolerate any similar episodes in New Mexico. He said that the duo has done good work for the tribe and its growing gaming operations.

French and Parrish couldn't be reached for comment.

Asked whether he thought it appropriate that casino executives fired from Nevada casinos for rigging contests were able to get other casino-industry jobs, Nevada Gaming Control Board Chairman Dennis Neilander declined to answer.

"The way that New Mexico chooses to regulate is up to New Mexico," Neilander said. "The way that the tribe chooses to regulate is up to the tribe."

Missouri Gaming Commission Executive Director Kevin Mullally said today that his state permanently disqualifies casino employees who cheat patrons.

"We've always taken the position that you are permanently unsuitable for crimes of dishonesty," Mullally said.

No criminal charges have been filed against those involved in the contest rigging.

"Dishonesty goes directly to character," Mullally said. "If you're willing to lie, you're unsuitable."

Former Nevada Gaming Control Board Chairman Steve DuCharme, now a gaming regulatory consultant and a member of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Gaming Commission, which regulates the tribe's Akwesasne Mohawk Casino in northern New York and would regulate a Catskill Mountains casino Caesars Entertainment hopes to develop for the tribe, said he understands the New Mexico tribe's decision to hire the duo.

"Based on the circumstances I know, I don't think their actions warrant the 'death penalty' (exclusion from the industry)," DuCharme said. "For these guys it probably sounded like a good idea at the time, but in retrospect they know they made a horrible mistake. I'm sure the tribal gaming commission investigated these guys and decided they shouldn't be precluded from working in the business."

Neilander denied Apodaca's assertion that contest rigging is widespread in Las Vegas, saying he hasn't heard of a single other rigged casino contest since he assumed chairmanship of the board in January 2001.

"I don't believe that is true," Neilander said. "That is a misperception. The rigging of promotional activities is not common in Nevada."

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