

## Up Close with James Maida, President and CEO Gaming Laboratories International



*As Gaming Laboratories International (GLI) celebrates its 30th anniversary year, we spoke with James Maida, President and CEO, about the company's meteoric rise to prominence in the gaming industry. Today, GLI employs over 1,300 professionals and consults and tests for more than 46 state agencies, 250 tribal gaming commissions, 475 jurisdictions, and 1,000 equipment suppliers from its 24 offices located on six continents.*

*Here is what he had to say...*

### **How was GLI initially conceived and what was the gaming environment like at that time?**

GLI was not a planned event, and we had no idea it would become what it is today. The company was initially conceived as a sole proprietorship in 1987 while I was in law school, testing machines for various states that were looking to get into gaming. Between 1987 and 1989, gambling was only available in Nevada, New Jersey, and Montana. Then, South Dakota became the fourth state to get gambling in the U.S., and in 1988, the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) was enacted into law.

In 1989, we formally incorporated as Gaming Laboratories International (GLI). South Dakota talked us into taking on their testing on a full-time basis and became our first client. Every year, a few more states and a few more tribes were able to get compacts, and we went from state to state, tribe to tribe, lottery to lottery and said, 'if you wanted to use electronic equipment for gambling, you should get it tested.' We grew along with the industry, and now, thirty years later, we test for more than 500+ regulators around the world.

### **The company has grown exponentially since then. What do you attribute GLI's success to?**

We owe our success to the 1,300-team members who walk through walls for customers every single day. Although we have a large workforce at GLI, we operate as a small business. Co-Founder Paul Magno and myself made a commitment from day one to put customers first, and that is the most important core value of our company. When we give good customer service and deliver on time – whether for suppliers, regulators or operators – we earn another shot at getting more work from them. We wake up every single day at GLI and work to earn the business as if yesterday did not exist. We do not rest

or reflect on our laurels. We know that every day, we must do better than the day before.

### **What are the primary services/products you provide for the gaming industry?**

With regard to Indian gaming, we provide testing, certification and regulatory assurance for gaming equipment so that it meets state laws and regulations, as well as tribal compacts and internal controls for tribes. Whatever the rules are in a particular jurisdiction, we are here to certify that the equipment meets those rules. We are a regulatory quality assurance company that works for the regulator, but also with suppliers every single day to get their products through the certification process, and onto casino floors. We also do this for the commercial gaming industry and lotteries worldwide.

### **What is the process to get a game certified?**

The process starts with a supplier becoming licensed in a particular jurisdiction. We meet with the customer before equipment is delivered and work to understand the equipment, how it operates, and how it may or may not conform to the rules of the particular jurisdiction they would like to sell in. There is a lot of work done up front before a particular game is even submitted. Once submitted, all of the documentation comes to us and it's a collaborative effort to go through the documentation and every rule in a particular jurisdiction. We work to determine whether each rule is passed or not passed. This is a very objective process, much like taking your car to an inspection station.

### **What has it been like for you to see the success of so many tribes in gaming?**

I remember going to the Little Six Casino in Prior Lake, MN when they first started negotiating a compact, and then

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to the Lower Sioux Community and on to Prairie Island. Those were my first visits to tribal properties. At the time, they were comprised of trailers, primitive buildings and a few slots. I remember going to the San Manuel Tribe in California at the time, and they just had a bingo hall and a few Pot of Gold machines.

Nobody had any idea that Indian gaming could grow to what it is today when we started 30 years ago. If you had been to those places 30 years ago, and then were to visit today and not be shown anything in between, you would be astounded. It's more incredible than I can put into words – it's beyond belief.

I'm so proud IGRA has created all of these economic benefits to Indian Country and tribal members over the last

30 years. Having had a small part of working with all of these tribes has been unbelievably heartwarming to see firsthand. I don't know any tribe that doesn't take the regulation and the operation of their tribal casino extremely seriously.

**Is there a concrete moment you are most proud of from the last 30 years?**

I've been extremely proud every time an Indian gaming compact has been completed between a tribe and a state, and with both parties satisfied by the results. There have been many milestones. While we celebrate our 30th anniversary this year, we really are thinking about what the gaming environment will be like in 10 years. We don't spend an awful lot of time looking back, and frankly, it's been almost a blur the last 30 years going from state to state, tribe to tribe, never really dwelling on any one specific event because they've all been really special. Every year there are new memories, but they don't wipe out the old memories.

**As technology evolves, what challenges and opportunities do you see impacting the Indian gaming industry?**

As technology changes, compacts written so long ago will likely become out of date and need to be amended or modified, which presents both an opportunity and a challenge. Sports wagering is the next frontier for tribes. Under what authority and legal structure will they be able to operate? It's a huge opportunity, but also may be a challenge in terms of how it fits under their current agreements with the states.

**How does GLI stay on the pulse of technology and regulation?**

We have a team of approximately 50 people in our compliance division whose jobs are to not only understand what the rules and regulations are, but also, along with our engineering team, work to review and consider new technologies, often before they are even produced in final form. We travel the world each week and have teams at manufacturer locations globally that review the newest ideas – whether skill-based games, networked games, or whatever the newest patented idea is – we see technology very early on to understand what regulations might be impacted. ♣

*For more information about Gaming Laboratories International, visit [www.gaminglabs.com](http://www.gaminglabs.com).*

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