



## Welcome Home: Making Guests Feel Like They Belong

by Sheila Schimka

With competition and a tough economy continuing to put the squeeze on casino profits, making guests feel at home is one way to keep them coming through the doors. That's why Fortune Bay Resort Casino in northeastern Minnesota is focused on being as welcoming as a north woods cabin – albeit a 50,000 sq. ft. cabin with a world-class golf course, full-service marina, RV park, gourmet dining and award-winning heritage center!

Fortune Bay's Players Club Services Department operates The Wild Edge Players Club, which consists of five levels that earn different benefits – the higher the level, the more benefits a player receives. The property's Host and Valet Departments also provide a combined team of 50 people dedicated to growing the number of best players and the amount and quality of their play.

### Who's on the Guest List?

Fortune Bay has a very unique customer base, due in large part to its location. The property is located in the far north of Minnesota, near the Canadian border. The area boasts some of the country's most gorgeous lakes and woods, making it a premiere resort destination. But because it is far from major metropolitan areas, most guests are locals. For them, the casino becomes a "home away from home." The environment is casual, and the staff becomes familiar faces to the players. Sort of like the bar in the television show "Cheers," at Fortune Bay they really do know the names of regulars and greet them like the friends they are.

Indian casinos, especially, provide a very "at home" feeling versus the more corporate environment that other high-end casinos offer. One of Fortune Bay's great strengths is its ability to offer a more personal experience for all players, not just repeat and loyal customers, but new customers that come to visit seasonally for snowmobiling, championship golf or world-class walleye and muskie fishing on Lake Vermilion.

### The First Visit

It all starts with getting a new guest through the doors for the first time. To do this, the Players Club Services Department actively develops strong relationships with new players, welcoming, recognizing and rewarding them and providing sales opportunities to grow their potential worth.

The players club team works with their colleagues at Fortune Bay to create new and exciting opportunities to win more. To make sure potential new guests know about these opportunities, the branding message is "Land of 10,000 Winners," a twist on Minnesota's nickname as the land of 10,000 lakes. By giving back more for the play, and by showing this in the property's advertising, a higher value for the players club as a whole is created.

### Welcome Back

To keep existing players coming back, Fortune Bay's hosts:

- Schedule "meet and greet" events with an ever-growing lineup of great entertainers;
- Hold special events and parties for top-tier players where senior management and the players club team thank them for being loyal patrons;
- Validate show tickets so that when the best players attend a show at Fortune Bay, everything is ready and waiting for them;
- Expedite and assist with on-floor promotions, making sure hosts are seen and guests are able to identify them as the natural "go-to" for any need that isn't covered by the standard players club services.

Fortune Bay also offers personal concierge services for players, and performs customer research, surveys and focus groups.

### Down Home But Still High Tech

Player development is part warm smile, part savvy data collection. That wasn't always the case; until 1960s, player development wasn't really much of an art or a science. Today it is both, so behind the north woods decor, Fortune Bay is on the leading edge of technology, collecting information to pinpoint how valuable each guest really is to the overall success of the property. This is done by looking at the overall value of a player using the players club card, and controlling the reinvestment percentage for everything done within the property.

Other keys to success include:

- Training more staff in customer service related issues;
- Making changes in each department with morale, ethics and accountability of each team member;
- Empowering employees to take more of a supervisory role in their departments;
- Encouraging a team environment across departments.

### A Happy Home for Years to Come

Native gaming continues to grow in leaps and bounds while keeping the 'at home' feel that each property creates for its own loyal players. Native gaming could likely exceed corporate-owned Las Vegas properties in the very near future, in large measure because guests love going out for fun where they feel welcome and at home! ♣

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