



Who We're Raving About: Mentors, Friends and Folks that Inspire Us — *Interview with Joan Harris, Player Development Manager, Boomtown New Orleans* **By Andy Holtmann**

From running her own advertising agency to cutting into the gaming industry to surviving not one, but two hurricanes, Joan Harris has experienced a lot. Now, back in her native New Orleans and working with Boomtown as its player development manager, Joan feels like she's finally found home — both in work and in life.

You and I recently shared some interesting stories about New Orleans. What's it like living there?

It's awesome for me because I live in the French Quarter one block off of Jackson Square. There's still a lot of rebuilding going on since the storm. Yet in the French Quarter it's better than ever. It's a lot cleaner than it was. There is always a festival going on. When you step out of your apartment, you're there. During the week it's truly a neighborhood. On the weekend, it's a party if you want it to be, and if you don't, it doesn't have to be. There's a new spirit in the city with all the re-growth and rebirth, as well as new people moving here from other places. I recently met a couple that came down to volunteer and they never left.

What was your personal story with Hurricane Katrina? Did you stay, evacuate ...?

I lived in Pass Christian, Miss. at the time. I worked for The Grand in Gulfport, which was part of Harrah's. I lived one house off of Hwy 90 on the Gulf. So you can imagine the rest of the story ... everyone (that lived in that area) had the same story. We did evacuate. We went to Birmingham, Ala. We came back and, like everyone else there, had nothing left but a slab. But you know what? *Continued on page 14...*

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Who We're Raving About (Continued from front cover) ...

At the end of the day, we felt fortunate because we didn't have to look at all the stuff and the sludge ... we were luckier than the people that got five feet of water in their homes ... or their homes were still standing, but in pieces. Ours was just this shiny slab of Adobe tile that looked like someone had mopped it right before we got there. And it was like a treasure hunt once we started looking for our things. We had a green metal roof and everywhere we saw pieces of our metal roof, we found things — little crystal angels and glass paperweights ... things you couldn't replace, things that had meaning. We never saw one piece of our furniture or appliances or clothing, none of that. But we found the important things, like even two of my mother's rosaries (she was living with us at the time).

So after Katrina, how did you make the transition to living in New Orleans?

I actually was going to stay with Harrah's and had an interview set up in Lake Charles, La. with the Harrah's property there and that's when the next hurricane, Hurricane Rita, hit. So I had to evacuate again. I didn't want to live in the devastation on the Gulf Coast and the casino I worked for, The Grand, did not reopen. The French Quarter was not damaged and we were able to find an apartment fairly quickly. So that's where we landed, and I was able to go to work for Harrah's New Orleans. I hadn't rented an apartment in 20 years ... never say never.

What led to Boomtown and Pinnacle Entertainment?

In a roundabout way I ended up back in Lake Charles and worked for L'Auberge du Lac (Pinnacle's newest property at the time). I loved it there and had a terrific opportunity as the special events manager, but I realized once living in Lake Charles that I had made a mistake. I was born and raised in New Orleans and really loved it there. My heart was in New Orleans so I moved back. I had an opportunity to stay with Pinnacle and transferred from L'Auberge du Lac to Boomtown New Orleans.

How did you get into the gaming industry?

I lived in Texas for 20 years and owned my own advertising agency. It was a full service agency I started in 1985. I didn't get into the gaming industry until 2001. I sold my business in 2000 and retired, or so I thought, to the Gulf Coast. After a few months I realized retired life was not for me. With the main industry being gaming on the Gulf Coast, I tried to get work on the advertising and marketing end, but I just couldn't break in. I ended up working for the Grand Gulfport on the hotel/customer service side, which was a total career change. In the first year, I moved from the hotel side to VIP services and then to casino marketing. At Harrah's New Orleans, I was a VIP concierge where I worked closely with the host team and VIP services. When I moved to L'Auberge du Lac, I worked in the marketing department and was in charge of special events and promotions. Last year I transferred to Boomtown New Orleans and was given the opportunity to work as its player development manager.

Now I understand you're doing some interesting things with that department now, rolling out a new host program and other things.

Putting together a host program was the vision of our general manager who came on board about a year and a half ago. So collectively we reached out to our other Pinnacle properties that had host programs and put together a program unique to Boomtown. Unlike our other Pinnacle properties, we don't have a hotel, spa or golf course. Our property is a three-level riverboat so we are all about selling the gaming experience, and to a mostly-locals market. Our vision was for our host team to become a sales team. We



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are all about relationship selling and getting to know our higher-worth customers on a personal level. We are in the process of expanding our team to six executive casino hosts reaching both domestic and Asian markets. Our host program is an incentive-based program. And they have an awesome opportunity to grow and be a driving force for increasing gaming revenue for our property.

So, I'm jealous, obviously, but living in the French Quarter provides for some interesting hobbies and activities. What are some that you enjoy?

That's an easy answer for me. Art, music, food and people. Art is still in my blood. I have my easel set-up in my apartment as an inspiration to start painting again. I love visiting all of the art galleries on Royal Street. I have friends that are artists on Jackson Square and there are so many fabulous street musicians that I have come to love. There is always a festival going on somewhere in the city. I am actually taking my vacation this month to go to the French Quarter Festival and all seven days of the Jazz Festival. Monday is a tradition to visit my neighborhood bar, Tujaeqes. They serve free red beans and rice to the neighbors. So it's great to go have a drink, see all your neighbors and eat red beans and rice. Even though the French Quarter is a tourist spot there is truly a sense of community here which makes it a fabulous place to live and work.

Your Gaming Professional Library: Our Classic Top Six Picks For May 2009



We know. We know. You're busy. There are more important things to do. But if you are not staying abreast of important knowledge in the gaming industry, not only are you missing opportunities to learn, but you will never be admitted to the SCAMP club (Smart Casino Marketing Professionals). Check here each month for classics as well as new books for your library:

1. "The Knock Your Socks Off Series: Coaching Knock Your Socks Off Service (2002)" — Ron Zemke and Kristin Anderson
2. "Customer Winback (How to Recapture Lost Customers – And Keep Them Loyal)" — Jill Griffin and Michael W. Lowenstein
3. "The Knock Your Socks Off Series: Coaching Knock Your Socks Off Service (2007)" — Ron Zemke and Kristin Anderson
4. "Cashing In On Complaints: (Turning Disappointed Diners Into Gold) " — Bill Marvin
5. "Groundswell (Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies)" — Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff
6. "Knock Your Socks Off Service Recovery (Knock Your Socks Off Series) (Paperback) " — Ron Zemke and Chip R. Bell

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