

A Quarter Of A Century Of Goodman Banner Waving For Las Vegas

An Interview with The Honorable Carolyn G. Goodman, Mayor of Las Vegas

EDITORS' NOTE Carolyn Goodman became the mayor of the city of Las Vegas on July 6, 2011. In 2015, Mayor Goodman was handily re-elected to another four-year term. In 2019, she was elected to a third term, garnering more than 80 percent of the vote. Mayor Goodman has been an advocate of Las Vegas' \$44.9 billion tourism industry and is a board member on the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. She also serves on the Las Vegas Global Economic Alliance



Carolyn G. Goodman

(LVGEA), Las Vegas Events, the Southern Nevada Tourism Infrastructure Committee, the Regional Transportation Commission, the Transportation Safety Commission, and the Clark County Regional Flood Control District. She is chair of the Las Vegas Redevelopment Agency and serves on the UNLV Medicine Community Advisory Board; the Governor's Technical Advisory Committee for Clark County School District Reorganization; the Governor's Commission on Tourism; and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Local Government Advisory Committee. She is a founding member of the UNLV School of Medicine Community Engagement Board. Mayor Goodman also serves on the Blue Ribbon Committee for Clark County Child Welfare Services. Additionally, she holds national leadership roles as a member of the United States Conference of Mayors (USCM), is a member of its Advisory Board, vice-chair of its Jobs, Education and Workforce Committee, and serves as the Chair of the Mayors' Business Council. In June 2013, she hosted the 81st annual gathering of the National Conference of Mayors in Las Vegas. The USCM honored her with the Mayors' 2014 Large City Climate Protection Award. Mayor Goodman is well known in the Las Vegas community for founding The Meadows School in 1984, Nevada's first nonprofit, college preparatory school for pre-kindergarten through 12th grades. She was recognized nationally by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) and the National Association of Independent Schools in 2006 with the Seymour Preston Trustee Award for Leadership. In 1989, the University of Nevada recognized Mayor Goodman with the prestigious "Distinguished Nevadan" award and in 2006 bestowed upon her an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree (PhD). In 2010, UNLV announced her as Alumni of

the Year in Education. She is also the recipient of the Frances Riker Davis Award for public service from her high school alma mater Brearley. Mayor Goodman began work in the hotel industry. Prior to that, she worked as a vocational counselor in West Las Vegas for the Department of Labor training and building employment opportunities for African Americans in a then-segregated city. Mayor Goodman attended and graduated from Bryn Mawr College where she served as Student Government President and earned a degree in sociology and anthropology. She earned a master's degree in counseling at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Will you highlight your career journey and what interested you in public service?

I have always been active in social service as expected by my parents, but never had an interest in political service. When we moved to Las Vegas in 1964 from the East Coast, I first worked in the hotel industry (the Riviera) in public relations and marketing and then for the founding president and head of the casino at the newly opened Caesars Palace. Thereafter I became a stay-at-home mother busy raising our four little children who were only 42 months apart. In fear of my brain atrophying, I pursued a master's degree at UNLV at night to keep my brain cells alive and active. As the children aged into preschool, my spare time was spent evaluating the community's public education programs and by the time all my children were in elementary school, I realized a need for another educational option in Las Vegas and worked to develop what would become Nevada's first and only nonprofit, nonreligious, independent, pre-K through 12th grade college preparatory school – teaching immersion Spanish and computer from its opening. After managing that school daily for 26 years (without salary), I planned to retire as my husband, Oscar, was finishing his third and final term as Mayor of Las Vegas. While I had held elected offices in school and had been President of the Student Government at my college, I had never given any thought to running for any political office, ever. However, our then grown children were about changing that by pointing out that there were so many projects and plans that their father had started in his 12 years which needed to be finished, so

they pushed, and I ran. Being elected in 2011, it was the first record in the nation of a spouse swearing in a spouse sequentially into the same public office. I am now serving in my third and final term completing what will be a quarter of a century of Goodman banner waving for Las Vegas. What has excited me for all of these years has been what a unique and surprisingly wonderful place this is to live, raise a family, enjoy life, and invest. We take great pride in the fact that our city is as diverse and rich in population, nationalities, religions, races, cultures, and talents as there is in the world. Everyone works and is important to building this world-class community. All are welcome to become active parts of pursuing their dreams in Las Vegas, a city where those dreams still can come true, and which propelled me to run for mayor.

How do you define the Las Vegas advantage and what makes Las Vegas a leading destination for business and tourism?

Never bet against Las Vegas for there is always the Las Vegas advantage. We are the world's top destination for travel, entertainment, and fun and for business gatherings, meetings, and conventions. Our stellar reputation for hospitality in our world-class resorts,



Mayor Carolyn G. Goodman with Mayor Oscar B. Goodman at the Smith Center for the Performing Arts



Mayor Goodman with Usber in her office in Las Vegas

our five-star dining opportunities, incredible and varied boutique shopping offerings, star-studded entertainment, and now our major league sports are all irresistible and part of the Las Vegas advantage. Realize, too, that some 150,000-hotel rooms are just 20 minutes from our international airport – not an hour travel, and not spread over many miles. Our future is as bright as the sun that shines nearly 365 days a year. With measured intensity to addressing all challenges with fervor that our resident population shares, we continue bonding to face tough times together, whether in the recent recession or during the pandemic. Remember, never bet against Las Vegas. We handle it all, a huge diverse welcoming family of people adapting to change so that we may remain the world's favorite travel destination in a beautiful, thriving community.

You have championed downtown development for Las Vegas. Will you discuss this effort and how it will impact the future of Las Vegas?

Downtown is where the City began and remains the core of southern Nevada. It is a thriving center of business, commerce, government, culture, and excitement. The downtown was a focal point and priority of my husband's 12-year term beginning in 1999, and has continued to be for me as well thus far during my 12 years in office. As all major interstate roads converge into downtown, growth and new development have been a natural. We have seen neighborhoods like the 18b Las Vegas Arts District come into its own. New businesses have joined existing favorites, and the City has done its part by improving the infrastructure on many streets including Main and Fremont Streets, and a full concentration on Las Vegas Boulevard is nearing completion. Improvements and additions to many of the hotel-casinos downtown in recent years have included the Plaza, the D,

Binion's, the California, and the El Cortez to name a few. Transformational to downtown has been the opening of the 777-room Circa boasting the world's largest sportsbook and its Stadium Swim complex. The VivaVision refresh of the Fremont Street canopy has drawn millions to the core of the City under which bands entertain for free on weekends and during holidays. Downtown is also where you will find the Las Vegas Medical District, Symphony Park (theater district), the World Market Center (international wholesale furniture, accessories, and clothing marketplace), and the most popular outdoor shopping mall, Las Vegas North Premium Outlets, thrive. Each of us who lives here believes we are beyond fortunate to live in an exciting, multidimensional community like Las Vegas. All the amenities that people travel to for enjoyment, relaxation, business, sports, and conventions are here to enjoy and experience to the fullest.

Will you discuss your efforts on improving inner-city schools in Las Vegas and the commitment and investment that your administration has made in education?

At the onset of my tenure, I committed that the City of Las Vegas would focus on early learning and preparing our children in readiness for kindergarten and reading matriculation. The school system and all public education have always been beyond the purview and control of the City. We thus chose to intervene through the preschool and after-school programs. Our Strong Start Program includes programming in traditional brick and mortar facilities as well as through mobile units which provide developmental and learning opportunities directly into some of our most challenged communities. Our ReInvent Schools are physical school community hubs that we have established to provide assistance to students and their families by providing wraparound services at the school itself. The concept is to reinforce the schools as the centers of the community. The City has also approved moving forward with a charter school to continue the efforts initiated in our Strong Start Program, now in its second year of operation. These are just a few of the ways that the city is working to create strong futures through education. Our goal is to have all of our children ready for or already reading in kindergarten, learning to love learning, and being taught only by state-licensed and better-paid faculty. We expect all children to be engaged in learning and to increase our high school graduation rates.

How has your administration expanded homeless resources and what more can be done to address the challenge of homelessness in Las Vegas?

On a daily/hourly basis we work to connect those facing homelessness with services that can assist them in becoming healthy, housed, and productive citizens. We do this through our MORE and Conditions Teams that bring our outreach efforts to the streets, into the encampments, and into our Courtyard Homeless Resource Center. The Courtyard is a low barrier, 24/7 safe shelter that is open to anyone who

needs help. Unfortunately, mental health and chronic drug/alcohol addiction are fundamental issues that oftentimes prove to be roadblocks to individuals accepting the help and services that are offered. Despite these challenges, the City is committed to breaking the cycle of homelessness by every means available.

What do you see as the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?

I am politically registered as non-partisan, I am a good listener and a pro-active mediator for I believe that it is important to remember that I was elected to represent all Las Vegans. Partisan bickering and political gridlock do not move the ball forward and do nothing to improve any quality of life. As a leader, one has to inspect what is expected to be certain that plans are being followed without shortcuts and only with necessary, approved change. Substantive factual data must be fundamental for consideration in the decision-making process. Being a good listener and helping to find compromise are essential to finding any and all success. When there is conflict, no one gains, no one wins – everyone loses, so fair and just compromise means a middle ground must be reached, a place where everyone can agree to give a little to get some of what they want.

What do you tell young people about a career in public service?

First, know yourself and understand what public service means and entails. Find your niche in which your education, experiences, and training can be best used and give you a good fit. For the most part, know you are part of a team, a family of people trying to make your community the best it can be, always reaching to be better. Know you work for the people, spending their public tax dollars and thus, you must be able to defend your part in that allocation. Public service is an outstanding career pathway and profession which will be as rewarding, fulfilling, and as exciting as you make it. Learn, grow, give all that you can, and then do more of it all.

As you approach the end of your last term, are you and your husband, Oscar, able to take moments to reflect and appreciate what both of your administrations were able to accomplish for Las Vegas?

When we arrived as somewhat dumb newlyweds in Las Vegas in 1964 – then with a population of less than 100,000 – surely an adventure would lie ahead of us. Never did we ever contemplate the wonderful, varied, and fulfilling lives that we would share these 59 years. Our years each serving as mayors were different, yet certainly beyond purposeful, challenging, and so exciting too. Throughout the quarter century we always realized and absolutely knew we were beyond thankful for the outstanding administrative teams and individuals with whom we worked and shared the journey, and for this all, both Oscar and I say, “thank you!”

What do you hope both of your legacies will be as Mayors of Las Vegas?

“Oh, I remember them...” ●