



Growing the Mohegan Brand

An Interview with Mitchell Grossinger Etes, Chief Executive Officer, Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority



Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania (left); Resorts Casino Hotel in Atlantic City, New Jersey (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Mitchell Grossinger Etes joined Mohegan Sun as a member of the casino's pre-opening team in 1996 as Senior Vice President of Marketing. Shortly thereafter, he was promoted to Executive Vice President of Marketing. In August 2004, he was elevated to President and Chief Executive Officer to oversee the overall management and operation of Mohegan Sun. Two years later, Etes was appointed Chief Executive Officer of the Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority (MTGA), an instrumentality of the Mohegan Tribe who own and operate Mohegan Sun. For several years, Etes held dual roles as CEO for MTGA and President and CEO for Mohegan Sun until 2011, when he decided to focus his efforts solely on corporate diversification as CEO for MTGA. Etes also serves as Chief Executive Officer of the Connecticut Sun. Prior to his career at Mohegan Sun, Etes worked in several high-level marketing positions at Players Island Resort Casino Spa in Nevada and Trump Plaza Hotel & Casino in Atlantic City. Before that, Etes was a partner in the advertising and public relations firm of Gordon Etes Associates after serving as General Manager at CCA/Holly Inn in Pinehurst. Additionally, he worked in virtually every capacity – and finally as General Manager – at his family's Grossinger's Hotel in Grossinger, New York. Etes is a graduate of Columbia University.



Mitchell Grossinger Etes

COMPANY BRIEF The Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority (www.mtga.com) is an instrumentality of the Mohegan Tribe of Indians of Connecticut, a federally-recognized Indian tribe with an approximately 544-acre reservation situated in southeastern Connecticut. The Authority has been granted the exclusive right to conduct and regulate gaming activities on the existing reservation of the Tribe, including the operation of Mohegan Sun, a gaming and entertainment complex located on a 185-acre site on the Tribe's reservation. Through its subsidiary, Downs Racing, L.P., the Authority also owns and operates Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs and several off-track wagering facilities located in Pennsylvania.

How has the Mohegan Sun brand evolved?

It has been an amazing growth story. We opened Mohegan Sun in 1996 and it was extremely successful. We have been able to create a culture of service for our guests, but what has been more

important has been the employee culture and the feeling of working at Mohegan Sun.

This is the result of having operated under our core values since the beginning. It was about the integration of the Mohegan Tribe's values, which are about taking care of the employee and your neighbors.

So we have created a great employee culture, which has led to that employee service product exchange situation where we create a great experience and people have wanted to come back.

In setting up the MTGA, our idea was to export our culture.

Our first goal was with Resorts in Atlantic City. We were able to go in there and implement how we do things. It has been well-received and our great group of employees appreciated our outreach. It's a combination of built-to-last and instilling Mohegan Tribal cultural values into a commercial company.

Is there a recognition of how much emphasis you put on the service side and on being a hospitality leader?

Our guests recognize it. They feel they're treated well by the employees, who are friendlier than at most places.

We're obviously gaming/revenue driven, but while providing that, we're providing service and experience.

How broad are the opportunities for growth?

We have three properties under management. We have a management contract with a tribe in Washington and we're in the process of bidding on a license in Philadelphia. We're also in the process of pursuing a gaming license in Western Massachusetts with Mohegan Sun Massachusetts.

We're setting up the MGA and MTGA to be scalable in order to grow. We have an HR officer at the MTGA level to help us plan for future expansion and taking on a significant number of properties.

Last year, you assumed management of Resorts Casino Hotel in Atlantic City. Has that progressed as you had hoped?

In terms of the boardwalk, it's fun and represents what Atlantic City is about. There has been a significant investment made: the whole casino floor is new. Margaritaville Casino has also changed its feel.

We wanted to incorporate the vintage brand of Resorts with the fun and energetic feel of the beach. The idea is that Resorts is the fun place and people can party there.

We renovated; there are player's clubs; all the bathrooms have been done; and the rooms are as large as any in Atlantic City.

So presenting Resorts as the fun place on the beach has provided tremendous progress in terms of revenue.

Did you anticipate the surge in gaming?

Everybody saw it coming. When it started, it was us, Foxwoods, and Atlantic City, although there has also been quick success in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts.

We knew when we opened that there would be more competition. How quickly it occurred is surprising, but this is still a growth industry and our corporate goal is to expand our footprint.

How critical is the food and beverage product, and do you need to partner in that area to be successful?

Offering Italian, Chinese or just a buffet no longer works. You have to provide signature dining opportunities and options that are special and different. You need to offer well-known dining and offer things that are unique and different, but not always with celebrity chefs.

We also have Bobby Flay and Todd English, so, where appropriate, we'll offer branded options.

Have the negative perceptions about gaming changed?

It has turned the corner. People are looking at gaming today as entertainment and it is recognized to create jobs and economic growth.

How important has your role as CEO of Connecticut Sun women's basketball team been for the property?

The basketball team is important because it provides us with a great amount of usage in our arena over the summer with 17 home games and playoffs.

We are also an entertainment company and the basketball team has legitimized us as such.

Have you always known that this is a company with which you would want to remain?

It has been special to see how many people's careers have developed at Mohegan Sun.

We have also come up with spectacular events and activities. To try these things once is exciting, but to do so many things over time and create brands has been amazing. ●