

Veteran Lake Tahoe showroom workers ensure a good time

By Susan Wood

STATELINE – In the diva world of entertainment, the “d” in maitre d’ could stand for David McClure with a capital D.

That’s because much like a shining star can carry a show’s performance, this host extraordinaire standing at the door in the dapper tuxedo can make an experience at the MontBleu’s showroom in Stateline.

After three decades on the job in September, McClure has seen it all over the years – including his casino change names, owners, management and budgets.

This modest local is the rock of the entertainment facility, where he caters to customers from high roller guests to visitors camping out around Lake Tahoe for the weekend.



David McClure talks about the performers who have been in MontBleu's showroom. Photos/Kathryn Reed

And this summer, McClure and company take the act out in the parking lot for the casino’s new outside concert series that

expands the concert venue from seating for 1,600 in the showroom to 6,000 outdoors. The concerts are designed to complement Harveys Lake Tahoe's longtime version across the street. A night of reggae led the series. In keeping with its youthful image, the next one features members of the Sublime group.

The 62-year-old host would be the first to admit he doesn't personally follow the hip, new music of the day. McClure preferred acts over the years involve the old-time entertainers. His favorite involved his mother. When his father died, he took her to see the late slapstick comic Red Skelton.

"I've still got the picture," he said.

McClure also enjoyed a show in the early years of Lionel Ritchie's career. Ritchie danced a lot, and his band played several instruments on stage. There was even a player piano carted in.

But it's the guests who bring McClure to work with a smile on his face.

"My job is to change people's experiences. You never know who will be standing in front of you," he said of the people waiting to be seated. "People plan their whole vacations around who they can see and when they can see them."

As an example, many women have asked to sit to see certain band members of the Moody Blues up close and personal.

"Women are the most vocal," he said.



Connie Bowland demonstrates working in the showroom isn't just greeting guests.

And many of the men seem to go along with seeing the shows to please their mates.

McClure's job involves customer service, entertainment and a little psychology. He's also a bit of a historian. For instance, he learned long ago that if Kenny Loggins ended up playing in Tahoe over a holiday weekend he would refrain from performing on the actual holiday back when he played here.

"He likes to relax (that day)," he said.

McClure knows all about that. He unwinds with his two cats and loves driving around Tahoe in the wee morning hours.

"You have the road to yourself. It's an amazing time in Tahoe before people get up," he said of his night shift.

Opposite schedules – such is the world of entertainment.

McClure's brush with the industry started early when he grew up in Marin County, home to some huge celebrities from the San Francisco Bay Area. He would skip school to see the original Jefferson Airplane group, which spawned the careers of Grace

Slick and Mickey Thomas.

“I wrote off Thursday classes to see them,” he said.

He liked Lake Tahoe and would visit occasionally from the Bay Area. He took on odd jobs, including a construction stint at Squaw Valley in 1970 where he “could pound a nail.”

After graduating from a San Francisco hotel and restaurant management school in 1977, McClure never looked back from the hospitality world. It’s been a whirlwind – especially with the number of shows Caesars Tahoe once scheduled.



Anthony Whalen is assisted with his uniform by David McClure.

The showroom wait staff used to see each other about every night. Now they’ll go weeks apart – with the exception of the busy summertime. On the night of Bob Saget’s show over Memorial Day weekend, the staffers enjoyed a reunion of sorts with longtime usher Artie Farokhpar and McClure’s assistant, Connie Bowland, excited to get back to steady work. Before that show, Bowland breezed in to the main wait staff room from her other job, a common practice for hospitality types in

Tahoe trying to make a living, Farokhpar pointed out.

At age 75, Farokhpar had worked for years with Horizon's Carnival Cabaret show before retiring, semi-retiring and coming on board with the MontBleu staff recently. He and his wife see it as a way of getting him out of the house, he joked with his coworkers.

The crew chats enthusiastically like a group of old friends while trying to get the pre-show work done. All this is done crammed into the small office space that resembles more of an oversized closet. McClure prepared 2009 South Tahoe High School graduate Anthony Whalen as his newest member of the staff on his first night. This meant getting him suited in proper dress attire. Meanwhile, Farokhpar needed a bow tie. McClure quickly came through and handed him one.

The staff has been forced to improvise as in replacing their own suits, having fewer steak-dinner-like perks and dealing with the loss of a wardrobe room. The latter was the result of remodeling at the casino, which the staff calls "the poor stepchild of Las Vegas."

In their one small space, signed photos of celebrities such as comedian Joan Rivers, country singer George Strait, rock guitarist Carlos Santana and pop singer Olivia Newton John line the walls. Six photos were missing as someone broke in years ago and stole them. Still, the loss goes unnoticed as the staff is focused on the job at hand.

Bowland reviewed messages from management regarding who would be attending the show that night. A newsletter called "Bleu notes" laid on her desk. She admits special seating instructions may come in at the very last minute. She commended their "ringleader" – McClure – for pulling it all together when attendees surprise the staff with added guests at the door. And sometimes fewer employees for the night means jumping in to sell or take tickets.

There is essentially no room for divas – “except on stage,” a staffer belted out.

“We’re like a second family, but we haven’t worked that often all together, so we have to catch up,” Bowland said.

She enjoys the whole environment – meaning the staff and the work. She believes taking the shows outside will be good for the Lake Tahoe market.

“Anything new is going to be good,” said Bowland, who came on board at the casino in 1979 as a cocktail waitress before settling into the showroom under McClure.

“I like meeting people from all over. Everybody’s in a good mood. They can ask us anything, and we do it,” she said.

She especially relishes working for McClure because he demonstrates grace under pressure in tough situations.

Ditto was the sentiment from Farokhpar about working under McClure’s supervision.

“He is a nice guy, helpful and part of the old school where you help each other,” the usher said.

Farokhpar sees his job as giving their customers a “warm feeling” about being in the showroom set up to make them feel special.

He and Bowland agreed genuine customer service is a lost art at times – especially in Tahoe’s revolving door of businesses and transient employees.

“I just tell them a little smile and a little thank you won’t hurt you,” Farokhpar said.