



Courtesy Las Vegas News Bureau, Las Vegas Sun and Rio Hotel

### Chronology of the cocktail waitress

Cocktail waitress uniforms have changed a lot over the years. From left to right, New Frontier cocktail waitress in 1957, Caesars Palace in 1987, former uniform for the Rio Hotel's Voodoo Lounge cocktail waitress and the Rio's current bevertainer outfit.

# Vegas Ambassadors

## Cocktail waitresses embody the glitz and gregariousness of Sin City

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*Vegas.com*

Las Vegas cocktail waitresses ... What's not to like? They condone your gambling habit. They bring you drinks like Hairy Armpits and Buttery Nipples. And they do it all while showing a lot of skin.

In other words, if Las Vegas were a sports team, cocktail waitresses would be the cheerleaders. They'll pep you up when you stay on a hard 17, and bring you vodka tonic to help drown your sorrows when the dealer reveals her 21.

Throughout Las Vegas history, the job of cocktail waitress has been a sought after one, earning a different distinction than the typical server job.

"Early on, cocktail waitressing really became one of the most glamorous positions in the casino," said David Schwartz, director of the Center for Gambling Studies at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. "Unlike the showgirl position, it's a job that's accessible to people. Personality is very important."

Another unique aspect of the Las Vegas cocktail waitress is the sexy uniform. Every hotel in Las Vegas has a different take, some more outrageous than others.

"This is one job that bridges the gap between uniform and costume," said Schwartz. "It's one of the ways that casinos brand themselves, one of the ways they show their identity."

In keeping with the times, the position of cocktail waitress has undergone some metamorphosis. But one thing is for sure: Cocktail waitresses are here to stay.

### Classic cocktail

One of the most iconic images of the Las Vegas cocktail waitress comes from Caesars Palace, where the women originally wore short, tight Roman togas and tall hair pieces.

The Caesars Palace uniform has changed over the years, but at least one of the cocktail waitresses hasn't. Sharron St. Clair has been serving drinks at Caesars since 1975, and has no immediate plans to stop.

St. Clair moved to Las Vegas from Australia at age 14 to perform as a contortionist in a show. One month after her 21st birthday, she quit the show and took the job at Caesars.

"I was too young to serve cocktails when Caesars Palace opened, but that was my goal," St. Clair said. "It was the place to be. It was the best and the most exciting place to be associated with."

She described the job of cocktail waitress as a goodwill ambassador.

"We make the customer feel as if they're extremely special, and do it with a sense of humor," she said. "They're not coming to a strange place. They're coming somewhere where they can be identified with."

Over the years St. Clair has developed such close relationships with her customers that she actually gets them cards for their birthdays, and vice versa.



Courtesy of Las Vegas News Bureau

Cocktail waitresses from the Sands Hotel in 1952, above, and from the Flamingo Hotel in 1957, below left. The position has been considered a glamorous one throughout Las Vegas history.



"I'm even talking to grandchildren of some of my customers who died," she said. "They bring me letters and cards. I've been known to cry in the middle of the pit."

Next year she is taking a trip to Italy for cooking classes with several of her customers, many of whom don't even know each other.

"I'm the link," she said, "for tourists from all over."

St. Clair has served many legends, including Frank Sinatra, who typically ordered bottles of Jack Daniels to share with his friends, and Liberace, whom St. Clair described as a gracious

customer and "the most wonderful person to everyone."

St. Clair has no regrets about her career choice. She said it has enabled her to live her life to the fullest.

"Very few people are extremely happy in their job, and I am," said St. Clair. "People keep asking me when are you going to retire Sharron? I'm having so much fun it's hard for me to comprehend. As long as I can hold up my end ... when my cheekbones go, I go."

### Would you like a song with that?

About five years ago, the Rio Hotel decided to turn the concept of traditional cocktail service on its head, becoming the first hotel in Las Vegas to have professional entertainers serve drinks to gamblers. They called the position bevertainer and posted an audition notice.

Eileen Ryans was intrigued. Ryans performed in Bally's "Jubilee!" on the Las Vegas Strip for more than 10 years and was preparing to retire from the show. Although she never saw herself doing anything involving cocktail service, she thought she would give bevertainer a try.

Ryans was the only "Jubilee!" cast member to attend the Rio's first bevertainer auditions. Six months later, when the Rio held a second round of auditions, "Jubilee!" cast members and several other Strip performers flooded the talent pool.

"We're a very tight-knit group," said Ryans. "I've never worked a job where people get along so well."

Like the typical cocktail waitress, bevertain-

ers serve drinks to gamblers. But unlike the cocktail waitresses in any other Las Vegas hotel, they also break out into song and dance every hour, on the hour.

"We give the guests a little bit something extra, something they're not used to seeing," said Ryans, adding, "I have to do two jobs, with a smile."

There's also one other detail about bevertainers that differs from the typical cocktail waitress. Bevertainers can be men!

"The guys are gorgeous, but their uniform is not as risqué as ours. We have to show more skin," said Ryans. "It's such a shame, they have such great bodies."

The men wear a shirt and pants, while the women are dressed in a skimpy black, lace getup. Ryans has been approached by many a customer who wants to buy her uniform. She doesn't ask too many questions, just politely tells them it's not for sale.

"I've had crazy money offered for these outfits," she said, laughing.

Then there's the occasional rowdy customer who thinks that a trip to Las Vegas is a license to proposition the cocktail waitress.

"That's where the service stops," said Ryans. "I just put them in their place, nicely."

While the position has seen some changes over the years, cocktail waitresses have epitomized Vegas ever since the early days. These women (and now men) interact with more visitors than any dealer, showgirl or Elvis impersonator ever will ... and they do it all with a smile.