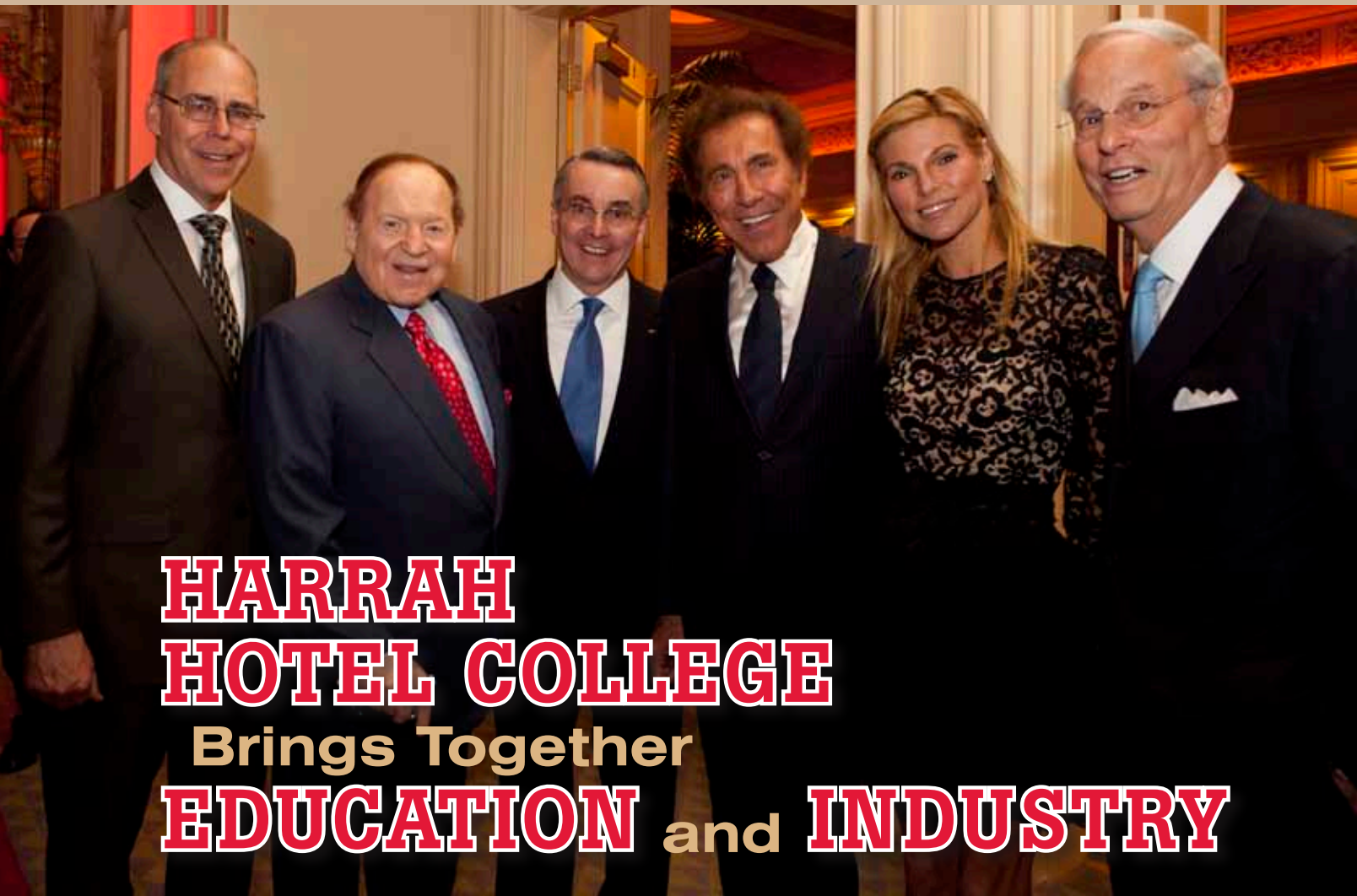


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# PREMIER

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## HARRAH HOTEL COLLEGE Brings Together EDUCATION and INDUSTRY

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# UNLV



# Epiphany Farms Fulfilling Alumni's Passion

Gael Hancock, '09 MS



Imagine using pigs to “seal” the bottom of a new holding pond with their wallowing. Or driving chickens around in an old RV, retrofitted as a coop with open yard area, to give them new spaces to find bugs, grubs, and seeds. Or starting an organic farm when you had never even owned a houseplant.

This is the world of Ken Myszka, '08; his wife, Nanam Yoon Myszka, '08; and Stu Hummel, all members of Epiphany Farms Enterprise (EFE) in Bloomington, Ill. Currently nearing the end of its fourth growing season, Epiphany Farms is a thriving farm-to-fork operation serving the surrounding community. It also provides the majority of the food for Station 220, a restaurant and bar in nearby Bloomington owned in part by EFE. The farm is home to 250-plus varieties of garlic, multiple vegetables and herbs, fruit trees, pigs, chickens, rabbits, ducks, geese, goats, and cows.

Myszka's passion for organic foods came from his training as a chef. “During school, I worked up and down the Strip in some of its most famous restaurants. It is there that I learned to appreciate ‘local’ and farm-fresh produce. However, I realized that the energy footprint and cost for getting that food was huge. That's when I started thinking about alternative options,” Myszka says.

The EFE team defines Epiphany Farms as being “beyond organic.” This means paying close attention to maintaining the integrity of the soil by rotating crops and moving the animals throughout the entire property for natural fertilization and pest control.

“Just because a food is organic doesn't mean it is nutritionally rich,” says Myszka. “The soils of most of the large industrial farms

have been completely depleted of nutrients; therefore, the foods have little nutritional value. We focus on foods that are inherently rich in nutrients, like garlic and honey.”

Myszka has a model for food production that is committed to supporting, growing, and showcasing a thriving local food culture. “At Station 220, we use about eight gallons a week of pasteurized but not homogenized milk from a local dairy farm,” he says. “However, for example, if we introduce our guests to the nutritional value and good taste of this milk, within our community, the demand will increase.”

Hummel and Myszka rotate weeks working on the farm and serving as chef/manager at Station 220. In addition, all of the employees at the restaurant have spent time volunteering at Epiphany Farms. They help plant and harvest as well as care for the animals. This is all part of the educational goals of EFE: helping people make a connection between the foods they eat and the way those foods are produced and the people who grow those foods.

“When an employee has been out to the farm and pulls Purple Dragon carrots, he or she is able to tell the customers that night: ‘I picked these carrots this afternoon. Their tops were full, lush, and green, and they're grown in incredibly rich soil,’” says Myszka. “This helps people start thinking about actually knowing the people who grow and prepare their food.”

Myszka travels throughout the area speaking to students and other groups about his vision for the future and how he hopes to change the way the world eats, “one plate at a time.” ■■