

## 20 Years in the Castle: Excalibur Employees Celebrate Two Decades of Medieval Times and Adventure

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EXCALIBUR – Once upon a time, in a land far, far away (OK, maybe not *that* far away – more like the corner of Las Vegas Boulevard and Tropicana), there lived a group of employees eager to open the city’s only castle. One handsome bellman prince by the name of Mike Wiley welcomed all the people in the land to his kingdom ... well, sort of.

“When they cut the ribbon, I had to get out of the way. People were flying through the doors, dying to be the first to put a nickel in the slot machines. It was amazing how many people were here,” recalled the Excalibur bell captain as he stood in the resort’s porte cochere this week, two decades later.

Tomorrow marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Excalibur’s grand opening. The event – complete with trumpets, fireworks, and 15,000 balloons – drew 30,000 guests. Some waited in line for four hours to be among the first inside the resort.

“At the time, there was dirt on both sides of us. We were the biggest, the best thing happening in the city,” Mr. Wiley said.

To mark the anniversary, the resort is hosting a two-day employee party, complete with free T-shirts and a special EDR menu. A memory wall in the back-of-house and a throwback special edition employee newsletter are also helping employees remember the past two decades.

Mr. Wiley, one of nearly 500 current employees who were part of the resort's opening team, has no problem recalling all that's changed at the Castle over the years.

"Anytime we've seen something that needed improvement, we've taken a close look at it. A lot has changed," he said. "You never want to be steady. You always want to be getting better."

One thing that, in Mr. Wiley's opinion, needed improvement was his uniform.

"I remember they put knickers and a purple, velvet tunic on me, and I kept looking around for the cameras thinking it was a joke. But those were our uniforms," Mr. Wiley recalls, laughing. "And the doormen wore skirts."

Fair maiden Pamela Briery (her official title is assistant hotel manager) also remembers her costume, er, uniform.

"All the front desk clerks wore these princess dresses with wild brocade and red fabric on the bottom," she said. "My daughter was 4 when I started working here, and now she says she felt like she grew up in a castle because she would see me in that outfit."

Other things changed, too. The resort's original swimming pool was moved fairly soon after opening when sun-worshipping guests complained the hotel towers blocked the sun all but three hours of the day. Today, that location is home to Sherwood (formerly known as Sherwood Forest Café). Excalibur's original beer hall served ale in large steins and was home to an oompah band called the Dumkopfs. Over the years, it's been Wild Bills Saloon & Steakhouse, WCW Nitro Grill, and Catch a Rising Star Comedy Club. It's now the Thunder From Down Under Showroom.

The resort in its early days featured a troupe of strolling entertainers. Jugglers, madrigal singers, magicians, jesters, belly dancers, and even a dragon roamed the property. Resort executives later opted for a more adult approach to marketing, but there's one thing that hasn't changed over the years.

"Even though we've gotten away from the silly costumes, we're still a castle. There's nothing like it, and people who come to Las Vegas want to stay here," Ms. Briery said. "Excalibur has stayed true to that same reputation."

That's part of the resort's success, according to Excalibur and Luxor President Felix Rappaport.

"The two things that have made the Castle successful for the last two decades are, first and foremost, the employees," he said. "They imbue the property with the spirit and pride that energizes it for everyone. Second is the fantastic and imaginative design. Everyone loves castles, with their mystery and whimsical, mythological quality. It's a testament to the builders and designers of the property that it still remains iconic and beloved by so many loyal guests, customers and visitors."

Now *that* is a fairytale ending.