



Southern Nevada
1111 West Bonanza Road ♦ Las Vegas, Nevada 89106
T (702) 387-5260 ♦ F (702) 387-2997
W stephenspress.com ♦ E info@stephenspress.com

Media Advisory

Contact: Krissy Hawkins
khawkins@stephenspress.com

Former Madam Provides Insider’s Look at Brothel Industry

Nevada has long been notorious for its indulgences and liberties. From bountiful buffets to scintillating shows to the ever-present slot machine or blackjack table. But there is one aspect unique to Nevada that is shrouded in much more mystery: legal prostitution. For all the lore surrounding it, how much is really known of the industry?

Laraine Russo Harper illuminates this topic in her memoir, *Legal Tender: True Tales of a Brothel Madam*. Harper relates her experiences as a former brothel madam and puts a human face on the women who sell sexual services and the men who buy them.

Regardless of one’s moral view on prostitution, everyone wonders what goes on, how it works. Illegal in 49 states, only Nevada’s frontier spirit continues to legalize houses of prostitution. And Harper provides a behind the scenes look into that world. As Jack Sheehan, author of *Skin City: Uncovering the Las Vegas Sex Industry*, put it “who better to share a brothel’s colorful history than the madam who saw . . . and heard . . . everything.” This fascinating and funny memoir uncovers it all: the working girls, customers, and the practices and pitfalls of a unique industry.

Harper served for six years as the madam of a well-known brothel in Pahrump, Nevada, sixty miles southwest of Las Vegas. During her time there she spearheaded a dramatic transformation of the brothel from a dingy collection of trailers into a luxury resort. Harper’s story is an inviting mix of heart and humor. Her writing is frank, often funny, and always straightforward.

Journalist Geoff Schumacher, who grew up in brothel-rich Pahrump, proclaims *Legal Tender* to be a “heartfelt and highly-entertaining” memoir, while also possessing a “legitimate value for those who want to learn a little something about business management and customer service. Harper brought her wealth of experience in the casino industry to bear on the brothel she managed, with impressive results . . . You need not be a manager in the sex trade to benefit from her sound advice.”

Along with expanding her business savvy while at the brothel, Harper also learned a thing or two about human nature. During her years as a madam she encountered it all, from virgins who came to the brothel, “There were quite a few mothers or fathers who would bring in their sons when they turned twenty-one . . . they wanted their son’s first experience to be a good one.” she explains. To the customers who tried to build relationships with the women in the brothel and wanted to “save” them, and the men who would honestly pay “just to talk”. As well as disabled customers who utilized the brothel’s services, “This is a segment of our society

that we often overlook, however, they have the same needs and desires that men who are more fortunate do,” offers Harper.

When she is not writing Harper dedicates herself to the Symphony Animal Foundation, a non-profit corporation of which she is the founder. SAF was inspired by and named after Harper’s two St. Bernards, Beethoven and Mozart. The organization was created out of the need for a no-kill facility in Southern Nevada that welcomes all animals, regardless of breed or species.

The Symphony Animal Organization was founded in 2007 and is soon to host a variety of events to welcome visitors and allow them to see the animals that need good, loving homes. SAF is also committed to educating the community as to the proper care and treatment of animals, particularly in harsh desert environments.

Harper no longer works as a brothel madam but still lives in Pahrump with her husband and seven dogs. Though uninvolved in the industry these days Harper is still esteemed by those in the business. She has spoken before Mensa and UNLV on the subject of illegal versus legal prostitution, and how it affects society. According to Wayne Bridge, CEO of the Sin City Chamber of Commerce, “Laraine Harper left a positive mark on the Nevada brothel industry. It takes a very special individual to oversee a covey of strong willed working girls and her sense of humor and ability to make the best and the most out of any situation is reflected in her writing.”

Harper is available for media interviews, readings, events and signings.

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