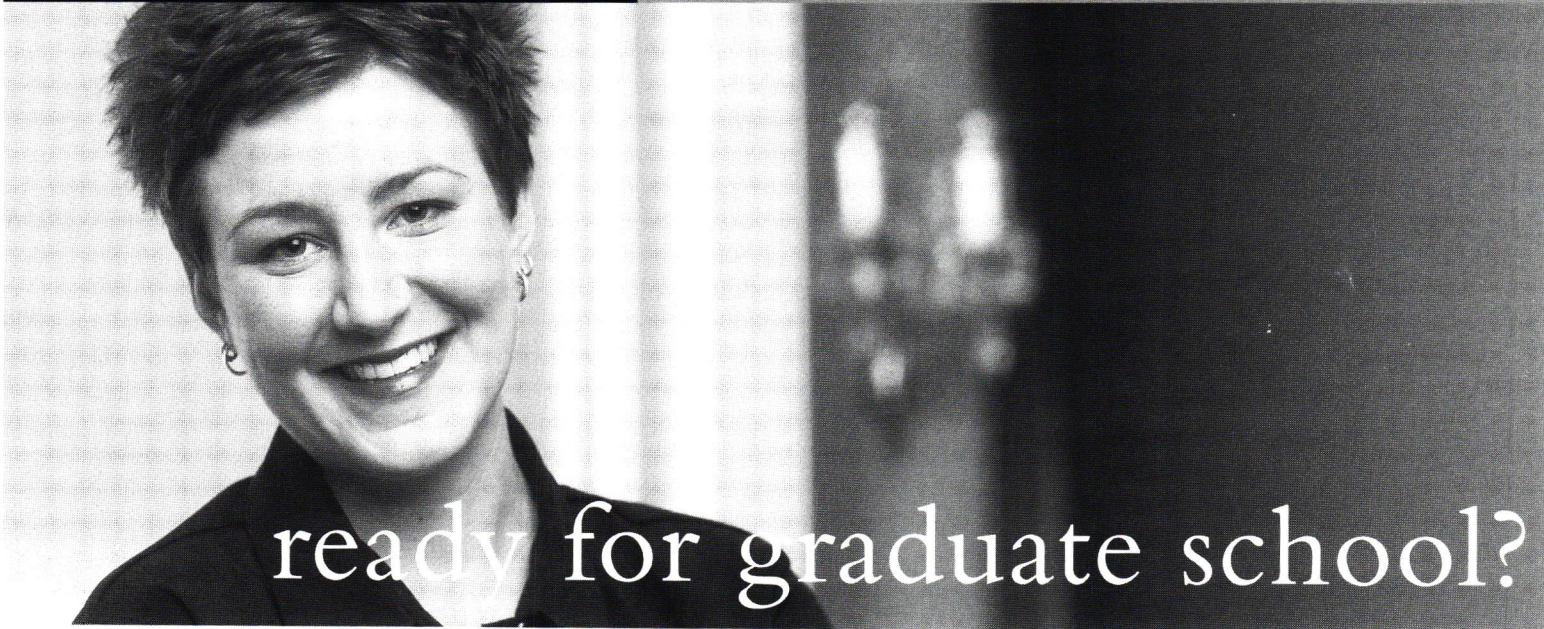


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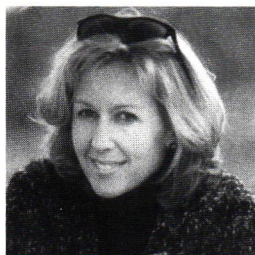
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# Gambling on Good Luck By Tracy Certo



*Already, the Las Vegas Sands Corporation has designed an elaborate \$879 million plan (that's no typo) that would redevelop the Bethlehem Steel site.*

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**On the cover:** MGM Grand Casino photo courtesy of Berg Muirhead & Associates

### Bethlehem, PA is a charmer

of a historic community with a lively, attractive Main St. shopping area where you can happily hang for an entire afternoon. Historic stone Moravian buildings line downtown streets and beyond the stone-walled river is the dormant steel mill that was once the lifeblood of this town.

In a slick brochure titled *Bringing New Life to Steel*, the Las Vegas Sands Corporation, which has a sudden and intense interest in the town, tells us that in Bethlehem they made more than steel—they made history. “They helped build the Empire State Building and the Golden Gate Bridge and helped win two World Wars.” And now in this historic twist, Bethlehem is in the running for a casino location designated for the Lehigh Valley. Already, the Las Vegas Sands Corporation has designed an elaborate \$879 million plan (that's no typo) that would redevelop the Bethlehem Steel site. A brighter project, they write, begins by respecting the past.

It's a well-done, full-color 10-page brochure with an impressive layout of the plan and strong, persuasive arguments about how the casino will bring many benefits. Despite the fact that Bethlehem Steel closed years ago, the town has been doing quite well. New Yorkers have recently discovered the place and started scooping up property as they moved in, choosing to commute 75 miles or so to Manhattan. Now, according to my most trusted source, my dad, new condos are going in downtown, priced up to \$700,000 and the area is booming.

In a recently disclosed study obtained by a local paper (Thanks, Dad), we learn why the Lehigh Valley went from “pretender to contender” for casino consideration. The study showed that a slots parlor located there would draw from a market with an average 2007 income of nearly \$74,000, fourth highest in the state. Pittsburgh's next at \$69,751.

While a Lehigh Valley slots parlor would generate about \$239 million a year, according to this study, a Pittsburgh casino would bring in about \$344 million. These tantalizing numbers are fueling speculation. “There is a belief that the area is poised to explode,” said Christopher Craig, counsel to Sen. Vincent Fumo, of the Lehigh Valley.

Having spent formative years in Bethlehem, I can attest to its many charms, not the least of which is its excellent macro-location: it's a quick day trip to New York City as well as New Hope, Philadelphia and the Poconos. Returning with my own family over the years has only served to make me appreciate the place more. Although the steel mills have long ago shut down, new housing has sprouted in former corn fields and the unsurpassable Wegman's grocery store (a good barometer of economic strength in the area) is faring well in its location close to my parents' house. Meanwhile, the venerable Moravian Book Store, still one of my favorite places anywhere, is thriving.

Obviously the city is at yet another crossroads with the possibility of a casino complex. But not everyone is cheering the prospect. Citizens are torn, many of them skeptical of the projected numbers and promise of revitalization. With such a large casino complex, the impact on this small city could be profound, they argue. How will it affect the wonderful downtown shopping area? Complicating the matter is the fact that the license might go to another operator who would build in neighboring Allentown.

On this side of the state, we're dealing with our own megacasino, which is causing consternation due to its Wal-mart size. Daily newspaper accounts inform us of various issues—the proposed ban on complimentary drinks, the question of making more money by putting the licenses up for auction instead of charging a set amount. It's a big issue with many concerns.

Which is why it's a comfort listening to Anne Swager, our irrepressible executive director who is co-chair of the Pittsburgh Gaming Task Force (p 6). Good to know that someone of her caliber is leading this bully pulpit to influence the design—among many other factors—of the place. More than anything, Anne is arguing for a destination, as opposed to a convenience, casino. One more along the lines proposed in Bethlehem, instead of a big box that is isolated and not an economic generator. She's learned a lot from this process and now we can learn a lot from her.

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