



International Masters of Gaming Law Regulator of the Year, North America 2016

by Sue McNabb



Each autumn, International Masters of Gaming Law (IMGL) recognizes outstanding regulators based on stringent standards, including preeminence in the regulatory field and their noteworthy contributions to the overall body of regulatory work.

The regulators are selected from various jurisdictions internationally based on a rigorous nomination and review process. The categories are Europe, North America, South and Central America, Australasia, Indian Country, and Evolving Jurisdictions. A regulator is not necessarily chosen from each category in each year. They are selected only if they receive the required nomination and meet the demands of the review procedure.

The specific criteria for the selection process include that the overall body of work as a regulator be exceptional and that the regulator make contributions to the gaming industry as a whole while demonstrating noteworthy achievements in the regulation of the industry. The nominee must also provide a stable regulatory environment in the jurisdiction, be identified as a person of high integrity, and demonstrate service to the community.

Through this annual selection process, IMGL continues its mission of “advancing gaming law through education” by selecting regulators who

reflect a similar mission in their management style while serving as role models in the regulatory environment. This year’s sole recipient of the award for IMGL Regulator of the Year certainly reflects these characteristics in his professional approach to the task of regulating a challenging gaming market. IMGL is proud to announce the Regulator of the Year, North America: Allen Godfrey, Executive Director of the Mississippi Gaming Commission. Director Godfrey joins last year’s notable honorees, Mark Ostrowski, Regulator of the Year, North America; Jenny Williams, Regulator of the Year, Europe; and Manuel San Roman Benavente, Regulator of the Year, South and Central America.

Regulator of the Year - North America Allen Godfrey, Executive Director Mississippi Gaming Commission

Allen Godfrey is a Certified Public Accountant and holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Mississippi State University. Mr. Godfrey began his career in gaming in 1991 as a Tax Auditor with the Mississippi Department of Revenue. During this time, the responsibility of regulating gaming in MS fell under the direction of the Mississippi State Tax Commission, Department of Revenue, which was the regulatory body for casinos in Mississippi prior to the formation of the Mississippi

innovation

Gaming Commission in 1993. With the Tax Commission, he was responsible for developing internal controls and auditing the casinos during the early days of gaming in Mississippi. Mr. Godfrey states, "I was fortunate to be in the division that was tasked with the regulation of this new industry. I worked closely with the industry professionals and developed a working relationship with them as the market grew." He further states of this period in his career that he enjoyed the early years, "as the learning curve was straight up for me and many others. It was an exciting time to be a young man in a position to work with such professionals as those that work in the gaming industry." Mr. Godfrey now has nearly twenty-five years of public service with the State of Mississippi.

Allen Godfrey has served as Executive Director of the Mississippi Gaming Commission since 2011. He first came to the Mississippi Gaming Commission in 2003, serving much of that time as Deputy Director. Of these early years, then Executive Director Larry Gregory states: "Allen served as my deputy director while I was executive director of the Mississippi Gaming Commission, a position I leaned on heavily in my day to day operations at the MGC. Time and again, he handled every issue and transaction with the utmost integrity and dedication, always reaching every decision with great thought and reason, always balancing what was best for the state with what was fair to the industry. He has continued to operate in this manner in his position as executive director, and this leadership has resonated throughout the country, as gaming companies respect his oversight and direction of gaming regulation in our state."

During his tenure with the commission, Mr. Godfrey has been instrumental in guiding the industry through continued growth, as well as assisting the industry to overcome several disasters. He was involved in the State's efforts to rebuild the coastal casinos after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. He also had to help lead the industry through the major Mississippi River flood of 2011 that impacted multiple casinos along the Mississippi River and the BP oil spill of 2010 that affected the Mississippi coastal gaming market. Of these difficult times, Godfrey states, "During and after each of these events, I watched as each gaming operator paid their employees for months after the event happened, and it really showed me what good companies they were, run by compassionate people, and it impressed me tremendously." Director Godfrey evidently has respect for those he regulates.

Since he took over as Executive Director in 2011, he has spearheaded new regulations aimed at requiring increased non-gaming amenities at casinos to drive tourism and economic development. Mr. Godfrey served on the State Taskforce on Internet Gaming and Sports Betting which was assembled in 2014 to assess the prospects of online gaming and sports betting in the State. Recently, Allen was again asked to sit on a task force to evaluate recent laws passed to allow Daily Fantasy Sports in Mississippi. He is regularly called upon to speak at gaming conferences around the country and is looked upon by his peers as a person of great leadership and high moral character. Mississippi is considered to have a strong and stable regulatory

environment, and much of that is owed to the achievements and contributions that Allen Godfrey has made to the industry. (Excerpt from recommendation).

Asked about the challenges of a regulator in general, Director Godfrey states that being able to react in a timely manner to the changes or advancements in technology in this industry is a great challenge to regulators today. We asked if he has advice to offer other regulators and to those they regulate, and he states, "Always get all the facts before you try to make a decision, do not have knee jerk reactions to situations. To those that are regulated, be truthful and upfront even it costs you financially." To others in the industry – attorneys, industry executives, educators and regulators - he offers the





following comment, “I would encourage people to learn everything they can about whatever business they are in, to take advantage of any training that is offered so that they are prepared when opportunities present themselves.”

Discussing his many achievements and which is most meaningful to him as a regulator, Director Godfrey states, “I hope I have achieved a respect among industry professionals and they know me as a man of my word. I feel I have contributed a common sense approach and as much as our statutes allow it, an environment that allows our operators to be operators and not worry about our agency micro managing them.” Certainly, he has achieved this high level of respect among industry greats. His peers in gaming around the state praise his achievements in his regulatory style. He further states, “I have met some of the most interesting people in the world and have developed friendships with industry professionals, and the challenge for me is always keep it on a professional level and remind staff that we have our job and they have theirs.”

Professor Ronald Rychlak of the University of Mississippi law school states, “Allen Godfrey’s clear vision and firm leadership have assured operators and consumers of safety, security, and fair treatment. He has ensured the integrity of the industry, maintained public confidence, and promoted economic development in the state.” A past member of the Mississippi

Commission, Leonard Blackwell II, states, “Allen Godfrey has been a steady influence to insure the continued tradition of good gaming regulation in Mississippi. Through Allen’s knowledge and experience, he has guided the gaming industry in times of economic downturn and during the resurgence of development we are now experiencing. I know of no better example of honest and able excellence in gaming regulation than Allen Godfrey.” An attorney who works in the gaming industry in Mississippi, Scott Andress, states of Chairman Godfrey, “I’ve had the pleasure of interacting with Allen Godfrey over the course of my entire legal career. At the Mississippi Gaming Commission and previously at the Department of Revenue, Allen has consistently conducted his various roles with an overriding sense of fairness, while never losing sight of the big picture. As MGC Executive Director, he has led the agency under successive Commissioners and sea changes at the Legislature, and also guided the industry across dynamic and sometimes turbulent periods. The consummate family man and public servant, Allen is an admirable example not only for those tasked with regulating gaming, but for all of us.”

Finally, a prior Regulator of the Year in Mississippi, Larry Gregory, now Executive Director of the Mississippi Gaming and Hospitality Association, states emphatically, “His work speaks volumes of the kind of man he is - efficient, organized,

and result-orientated. The resiliency of the Mississippi gaming market has been buoyed by Mr. Godfrey. Much is owed to the achievements and contributions that Mr. Godfrey has made to the industry. He is fair, thoughtful, and upright, traits that cannot be fabricated or easily swayed.” These praises of Director Godfrey’s regulatory style and integrity certainly reflect his notable achievements in the industry and insure his place of honor as an IMGL Regulator of the Year.