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LAS VEGAS — As the 18 restaurants and bars at the Bellagio sat dark for nearly four days following a resortwide power outage April 11, the masterminds that once recruited the resort's stellar culinary talent were plotting new breakthroughs further up the Las Vegas Strip.

There, hotel-casino impresario and former Bellagio owner Steve Wynn has reassembled his senior team — returning Elizabeth Blau to his fold as executive vice president of restaurant marketing and development — to attract big-name chefs and restaurant concepts for the \$2.4 billion Wynn Las Vegas.

The lavish resort, slated to open next April, reportedly will feature Wynn's fabled art collection, a golf course designed by Wynn and Tom Fazio, a Ferrari and Maserati dealership, and 19 dining establishments.

Blau said she once considered the Bellagio the pinnacle of her career but now sees even greater challenges and opportunities at the new property.

Meanwhile, as plans or new operations proceeded for scores of other epicurean business ventures in the city, the \$1.6 billion Bellagio complex was recovering from the massive power outage that caused it to close and operate on emergency power for three and a half days. The shutdown cost the resort, which now belongs to MGM Mirage, up to \$3 million per day in revenues and \$750,000 to \$1 million daily in net operating income in addition to the equipment and overtime labor for

repairs, company spokesman Alan Feldman confirmed.

To honor the resort's contracts with local unions, including the Las Vegas Culinary Workers' Union Local 226, MGM Mirage agreed to pay the salaries of some 3,500 union

ETHAN MILLER/REUTERS



The power outage that forced the Bellagio to close for three and a half days cost the restaurant-dense resort up to \$3 million a day in revenue and \$750,000 to \$1 million daily in net income.

workers on each shift, at an expense of "a couple million [dollars]," Feldman estimated. A source at the union, who requested anonymity, said the contract at the Bellagio stipulated guaranteed wages and the outage would not have negated contractual obligations.

The Bellagio's prominent restaurateurs, including Aqua operator Michael Mina, were given "incredible support" by the property to cope with the situation, Mina said. Although the resort's restaurants — among them branches of the New York

Maccioni family's Le Cirque and Circo concepts, Jean-Georges Vongerichten's Prime and Todd English's Olives — lost untold numbers of reservations, many were spared costly product losses. According to Mina, the hotel's

refrigeration remained on during the outage.

Mina, who also operates the Nob Hill and Seablue restaurants at the neighboring MGM Grand resort, said he relocated his perishable goods to refrigeration in that complex, however.

While Mina's staff readied Aqua for an April 15 reopening, the chef-operator himself took part in the concurrent "Restaurant & Hospitality State of the Industry" panel at the 25th annual Las Vegas International Hotel & Restaurant (See **BELLAGIO**, page 83)

Bellagio blackout doesn't dim Las Vegas' boomtown luster

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Show. Joining him on the panel were local Ritz-Carlton general manager Doug Brooks and Chicago-based Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises' senior vice president, Jay Stieber.

Sam Facchini, co-owner of the local Metro Pizza chain, ran the panelists through a question-and-answer session patterned after the television show "Jeopardy," with such topics as "Training for Tomorrow," "Trend or Fad?" and "Things That Keep You Up At Night."

Mina, whose soon-to-be-five-unit Mina Group is based in San Francisco, said most of his late-night worries are "related to staffing. After creating a concept, we have to recruit the staff to fit that concept." When each of the panelists was asked for "words of wisdom" at the end of the session, Mina returned to the recruitment theme, noting: "The people you build in the restaurant will be the reason whether your company is successful or not. Don't expand until you have that core of people. Otherwise, when you expand,

your philosophy will disappear."

The Nevada Hotel & Lodging Association annually awards top operators during the show. This year's Nevada Restaurateur of the Year was Paymon Raouf, owner and operator of two Mediterranean Café & Hookah Lounge locations. Harold Holder, chief executive of Holder Hospitality Group, was named Nevada Hotelier of the Year, while former Caesars Palace senior vice president of hotel operations George Markantonis was given the NHLA's Lifetime Achievement Award.

Mina's staffing challenge might become more difficult in the coming years, given the fact that the chef and restaurant influx orchestrated by Blau and Wynn at the Bellagio five years ago helped spark a flourishing culinary scene in Las Vegas.

An example of the model Blau said she intends to follow for Wynn Las Vegas is that of chef-

workers on each shift, at an expense of "a couple million [dollars]," Feldman estimated. A source at the union, who requested anonymity, said the contract at the Bellagio stipulated guaranteed wages and the outage would not have negated contractual obligations.

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Elizabeth Blau, seen here with her restaurant partner, chef Kerry Simon, calls Steve Wynn's proposed Wynn Las Vegas "his masterpiece" and claims it will top his Bellagio creation.

restaurateur Bradley Ogden. He moved to Las Vegas to open a namesake restaurant at Caesars Palace that some say has trumped his operations in the San Francisco area in terms of recognition.

"He gets it," Blau asserted. Ogden confirmed Blau's observation, admitting, "I spend

about 90 percent of my time" in Las Vegas.

Among the recent additions to the city's restaurant lineup, both on and off the Strip, are the B.R. Guest group's Fiamma and chefs Thomas Keller's Bouchon; Rick Moonen's RM Seafood; and Hubert Keller's Burger Bar, which Keller will follow with a branch of his San Francisco landmark Fleur de Lys. Still other Las Vegas newcomers are Gaylord at the Rio and an outpost of the historic Los Angeles deli Canter's.

Coming attractions include Tom Colicchio's "Wichcraft, a restaurant by Chicago chef-operator Rick Bayless, Wolfgang Puck Bar & Grill and Emeril Lagasse's revamped Emeril's at MGM Grand. At sister property Bellagio, nightclub mogul Andrew Sagnon teamed up with former N9NE Restaurant Group chef Brian

Massie for FIX Restaurant & Bar.

Mandalay Resort Group will debut Mix in Las Vegas by French culinary star Alain Ducasse, as interpreted by chef Bruno Davailon, at the all-suite THEhotel, adjacent to the Mandalay Bay resort. Richard Melman's Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises, which has several fine-dining operations at the Paris Las Vegas resort, will open a branch of his Café Ba-Ba-Reeba! at the Fashion Show Las Vegas mall, while LEYE's sister company, Icon, will open Joe's Seafood, Prime Steak & Stone Crab at the 175,000-square-foot expansion of the Forum Shops mall next to Caesars Palace.

Also at the Forum Shops will be outposts of Sushi Roku from Los Angeles and New York's Il Mulino.

Additionally, executives at the Treasure Island resort on the Strip reportedly are working with West Coast-based chef Richard Sandoval to create a Latino restaurant there, while Mario Batali is rumored to be considering a location at the Venetian resort.