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## GEOFF SCHUMACHER: UNLV needs new stadium

The firing of UNLV coach Mike Sanford has rekindled debate over what it takes to have a strong college football program here. While critics blame Sanford for failing to win games, others, including Sanford himself, contend that subpar facilities and tepid community support contributed to his inability to build a successful program.

Everybody's right.

It's clear from his record of wins and losses that Sanford couldn't get it done at UNLV, and blaming the facilities is a poor excuse. At the same time, Sanford is right that any coach would have a better chance to succeed here with improved facilities and more fan backing.

My two cents: Build a football stadium on or adjacent to the UNLV campus.

I realize this is a tall order. Darren Libonati, who manages Sam Boyd Stadium, about eight miles from campus, estimates a new stadium would cost \$250 million.

Adding to the challenge, UNLV is landlocked. To build a stadium, it would need to buy up 10-12 acres in the densely developed area of Maryland Parkway and Tropicana Avenue. This means buying many parcels of land and then tearing down what's on them.

For a government entity to find that kind of money in this economy wouldn't be easy. But let's not say it can't be done. Las Vegas knows better than any place in America that all kinds of audacious things can be done if we want to do them.

A football stadium on campus would not ensure a winning program. But when students and community members congregate on Saturdays in the fall at the university to cheer on the home team, the positive effects spread beyond what happens on the field.

### The game-changer

Certain dates stand out in Las Vegas history. There's May 15, 1905, when a land auction populated the Las Vegas townsite. And March 19, 1931, when the state legalized casino gambling. On Dec. 26, 1946, Bugsy Siegel opened the Flamingo Hotel. On July 31, 1969, Elvis Presley debuted at the International.

A more recent date has earned a place on this auspicious list: Nov. 22, 1989. On that day, 20 years ago this weekend, Steve Wynn's The Mirage opened on the Strip.

The Mirage changed everything for Las Vegas. It drew new customers and triggered an unprecedented building boom that transformed Las Vegas from gambling haven to international resort destination.

Las Vegas had plateaued during the '80s, and so when Wynn announced plans for a large new Strip resort, more than a few people questioned his sanity. But Wynn gambled that his vision and more than \$600 million would prove those skeptics wrong.

He succeeded. The Mirage was a smash hit, enticing visitors with its lavish decor, attractions, restaurants and shows. It was an all-encompassing experience in which gambling was just one element. The Mirage's success spurred the development of many more new resorts during the '90s, including the Excalibur, MGM Grand, Treasure Island, the Luxor and others. The Mirage signaled nothing less than a paradigm shift for Las Vegas.

As The Mirage celebrates its 20th anniversary, the skeptics have arisen again to question the wisdom of

CityCenter. At \$8 billion and opening in a time of global economic turmoil, CityCenter is perhaps an even bigger gamble than The Mirage was. But CityCenter has all the makings of another game-changer for Las Vegas. Perhaps Dec. 16, 2009, will one day earn a spot on the list of memorable dates in local history.

## **A solar update**

In September, two large renewable energy projects in Amargosa Valley, 80 miles north of Las Vegas, were the focus of a New York Times article about high water use by the most economical form of solar power generation: the solar thermal plant.

The article pointed to the obvious dilemma: The sunny, wide-open deserts of the Southwest are great places to erect seas of solar panels, but the water demand of solar thermal technology poses a challenge to drought-ridden states. The Solar Millennium facilities in Amargosa Valley would use 1.3 million gallons of water per year, representing 20 percent of the valley's available groundwater supply.

But in response to public concerns, Solar Millennium announced this week that it will add dry-cooling technology to its Amargosa solar plants, which means a 90 percent reduction in water use. This is excellent news for Amargosa and for Nevada, which has the potential to become a world leader in solar power generation but only if it does things right from the start.

For its part, Solar Millennium says it hopes this improvement in its Amargosa projects will accelerate the approval process and allow construction to begin by the end of 2010.

It should. Those Amargosa plants represent a \$3 billion investment in the state economy. The plants will employ 800 construction workers and create 100 permanent jobs. They've never been needed more.

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