MR. GREG MARKELZ

CHAIRMAN JAMES: Greg Markelz.

MR. MARKELZ: Thank you for allowing me to address the Commission this afternoon. I'm the president of Markelz Office Products in Joliet, Illinois, where as you know there are two riverboat casinos. Our business has been in Joliet for over 100 years. It is a rare third generation family business. I just purchased the business three years ago, so it's fairly recently third generation.

In the early 90's there was a time when I didn't know I was going to buy the business and it would become third generation because most of the businesses in the Joliet area at the time was either stagnant or in a downturn. We had a high unemployment rate and our business was no exception. We were down in sales and just the opportunities for us to sell to people locally were limited.

With the emergence of the riverboats in Joliet the whole business community took a different attitude. People were going from just trying to survive to a more positive aggressive stance toward improving the economy and the quality of life in the community. The improvements have been visible and noticeable. Streets and sidewalks are improved, cleaner, just the basic feel of what you see when you walk around the city is much improved.

I have lived there my whole life so I've seen, for the last 39 years, everything. The presence of the casinos themselves also added a touch of class. It's a kind of view that you may not hear that often. But when I would talk to my friends
about, hey, you know, there goes the Empress, it just opened last month and the idea was we've really got something here now we can be proud of. It's really neat to go down there and see something that's kind of classy instead of just your typical malls and what we're used to seeing in town.

The circle of people employed by the casinos is very wide, as most of the people I know have either a friend or relative or acquaintance that works there. I even have an employee that goes quite often to the boats, not just Joliet, but all over. She travels to Iowa and Indiana and enjoys herself. I would like to think she's a more typical type of gambler who goes, knows what risk she can take and wins some and loses some. She knows she probably comes out on the negative side, but she gets a lot of entertainment for that dollar.

Also the employees that they do have in Joliet spend a tremendous amount of money improving the outlook for hundreds of small businesses. These businesses have less of a voice than the large businesses. They're not that vocal about what happens but the small restaurants, video stores and things like that, people have money to go out and spend every night, that makes an impact.

In reference to my business going after a large account like the Empress or Harrah's required new thinking. I had to improve many aspects of our business in order to compete with larger competitors than I ever had before. So the impact of gaining these accounts was from June, '95 till now, our sales have doubled, the number of our staff has doubled as well. We continue to expand as a result of the lessons we learned from the time the riverboats came to town. Thank you.
CHAIRMAN JAMES: Thank you.