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EAT'M founder reflects on conference's effect on Las Vegas



Lisa Tenner, who has worked in branding and marketing for bands and the music industry for over 30 years, in her house on Tuesday, June 6, 2017. Patrick Connolly Las Vegas Review-Journal @PConnPie



By Bailey Schulz Las Vegas Review-Journal

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It's been 15 years since the last Emerging Artists and Talent in Music conference, but the event's founder and producer, Lisa Tenner, can still see its effect on Las Vegas.

The music conference kicked off in 1998 and was the first of its kind in Las Vegas, Tenner said, bringing together 150 artists, 10 keynote speakers 34 panels and 98 sponsors.

EAT'M preceded several other music conferences and festivals in Las Vegas. The Pollstar Concert Industry Consortium moved to Las Vegas in 2000, the Academy of

Country Music Awards in 2002 and music festivals like the [Electric Daisy Carnival](#), which arrived in 2011.

The conference was a success. Twenty-four bands were signed to major labels after the first EAT'M, including names like Slipknot, Papa Roach and Michelle Branch, she said.

While Tenner said EAT'M was the greatest accomplishment in her career, pulling it off wasn't easy. She put in 80 hours of work each week for the conference, working seven days a week.

But Tenner was used to hard work.

Career beginnings

Tenner, born and raised in Los Angeles, worked alongside big names from an early age. Her father, Morris Ratner, promoted boxer Muhammad Ali through United World Enterprises in the early '60s and owned restaurants in California that were frequented by celebrities.

Tenner grew up dancing ballet and performed annually with the New York City ballet from the age of 10 to 20. But her father persuaded her to leave dance and enter the business field. She studied accounting and psychology between 1968 and 1971 at the University of California, Los Angeles, and later joined the stock brokerage firm Goodbody and Co.

After trying out a career in TV and radio as a business manager, she decided she wanted to be in the music industry and joined business manager Ed Silver in 1983 before joining management firm Nanas, Stern, Biers, Neinstein and Co. She went on to start her own firm in 1989.

One of the few female business managers in the Los Angeles at the time, Tenner would often take on tasks other employees wouldn't. Like the time she took off on a plane for Texas after receiving a phone call from her manager, Steve Barnett, around midnight. A client needed a new tour manager, and Barnett wanted her to go to Texas immediately to hire a new one.

"I did more than the average business manager. I got highly involved," Tenner said. "I did whatever it took to help make my client successful. I couldn't guarantee their success, but I would try to make them successful and keep their brands going."

Toward the end of her career in business management, Tenner had worked with an impressive list of names, including Toto, Jane's Addiction, Warrant, KORN, Soundgarden and the Monkees.

Impact on Las Vegas

By the mid-1990s, she was ready to take the next step in her career and personal life. She moved to Las Vegas in 1994 to marry her husband, Mark, and shortly after redirected the focus of her company, Tenner and Associates, to branding and marketing.

Only four years after the move, Tenner began to make her mark on the city.

After attending the South by Southwest music conference in Austin in 1997, she came away thinking of all the ways the conference could improve.

“You can't showcase 900 bands over the whole city in a week. They're not going to get signed,” she said. “I told my girlfriends ... I think I can do it better than they can. I can make it better, I can make it stronger.”

And so EAT'M was born in 1998, featuring famed record producer George Martin as the keynote speaker.

“My objective (with EAT'M) was to put this city on the map to break artists,” Tenner said.

“There's talented people all around the country, all around the world ... That's why we did EAT'M. So we could bring the people here that we need to see.”

The conference ran for four years, skipping 2001 and ending after 2002.

Tenner said the growing size of the conference would make it lose its intimacy, and the increasing popularity of downloaded music was changing the face of the industry.

Since EAT'M, Tenner has seen the Las Vegas' entertainment industry flourish.

“I think that Vegas has now cemented itself firmly as the entertainment capital of the world, undoubtedly,” she said, pointing to the success of venues like The Smith Center for the Performing Arts and the T-Mobile Arena.

While Tenner was the event's founder and producer, she credits many others for helping the conference come to light, including former Lt. Gov. Lorraine Hunt, former Nevada Govs. Bob Miller and Kenny Guinn and former Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman.

“I went to the people who believed in me,” Tenner said. “A team of people can change the (Las Vegas) landscape.”

Although she has taken a step back from the music industry, Tenner is still working hard in the Las Vegas entertainment industry.

Her branding and marketing company, Tenner and Associates, has turned its focus toward the poker industry and film and TV, including the Emmy award-winning PBS program “Biz Kid\$.”

Hunter Hopewell, 21-year-old filmmaker who considers Tenner a mentor, said Tenner's success has stemmed through her dedication and personal connections.

“She knows how to get things done quickly,” he said. “Anything you need, she always knows somebody.”

For Tenner, there's one word that she attributes to the success in her career: persistence.

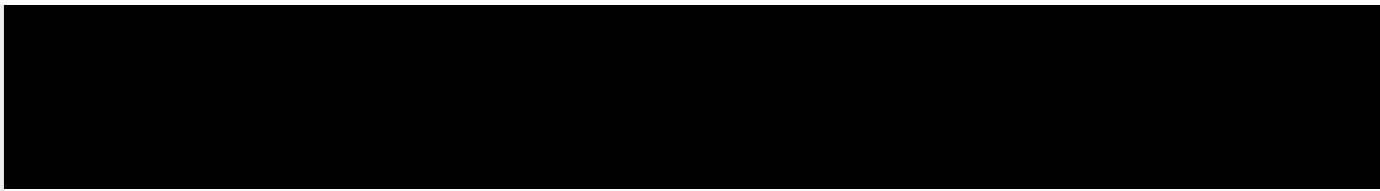
“You have to be persistent,” she said. “It can get very exhausting, but it does work. ... Don't ever take no for an answer.”

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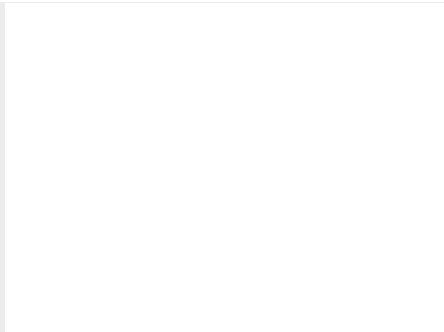
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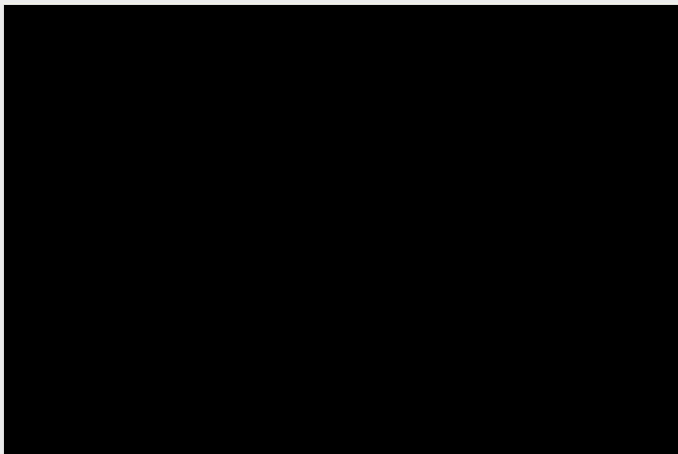
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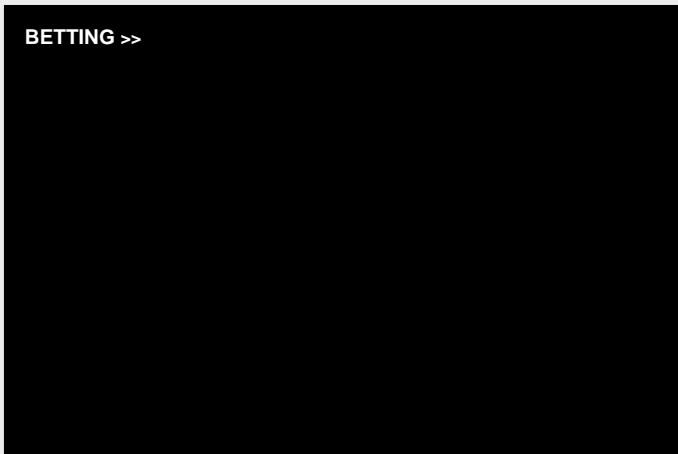
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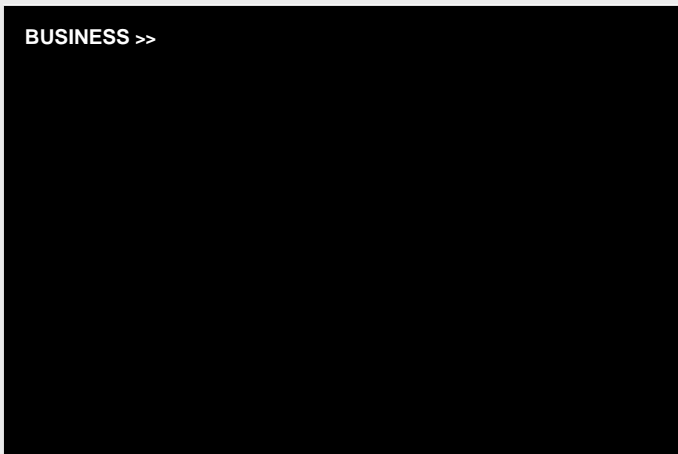
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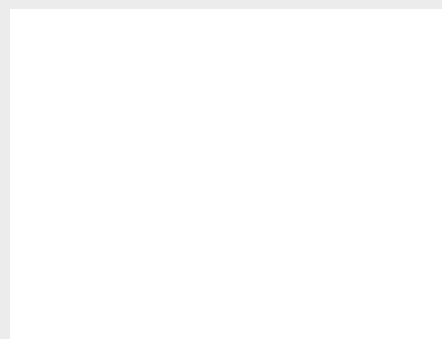
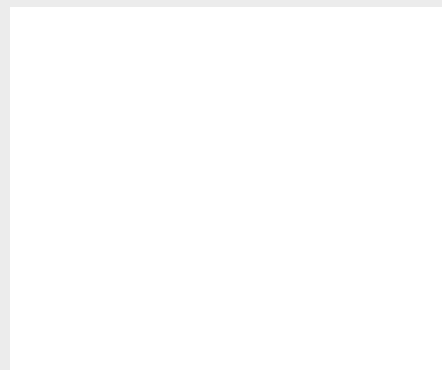
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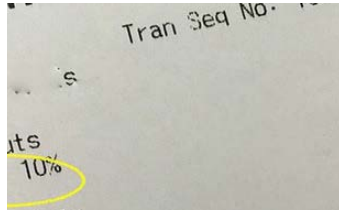
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