

BACK STORY

DOES WHAT HAPPENS IN LAS VEGAS STAY IN LAS VEGAS?

BY PATRICIA D. CAFFARATA, ESQ.

Las Vegas is not only a popular place for tourists from all over the world to come for fun and entertainment; the city is also a great destination for computer geeks hoping to learn how to crack computer codes and encryptions.

Will Las Vegas become the hackathon capitol of the world? Recently, the members of the Las Vegas Hospitality Association discussed promoting one- to two-day brainstorming sessions for programmers and software engineers to solve some of the issues facing the hospitality industry. The industry is rapidly changing due to automation and technology. One business, Uber, is actively considering hosting a hackathon event in town, and a company spokesman suggested that such a gathering would be a great place to meet prospective employees.

Hackers are not new to Las Vegas. Def Con, the world's largest hacker convention, has been meeting in Las Vegas for 23 years. Attendees mingle with hackers, cyber security experts, students and law enforcement agents, including representatives from the FBI, Department of Defense and U.S. Post Office, among other organizations. The most recent conference took place on August 4-7, 2016, at the Paris Las Vegas Hotel and Casino and Bally's Las Vegas. If you missed this year's event, plan to attend next year on July 27-30, 2017, at the same hotels.

In 2016, no surprise, the registration fee is \$150, payable in U.S. dollars, the only acceptable form of payment. Apparently, the conference sponsors do not put too much faith in credit cards; they demand hard, cold cash. Conference promoters claim their meeting is the place to learn about software programs, computer hardware and how to crack them, no matter what the device or software is, or how it has been encrypted.

Among the activities on the Def Con agenda are lectures, contests and games. Capture the Flag (CTF) is one of the more popular contests on the schedule. The game is based on the outdoor version, played on a grass field with each team trying to snatch the opposing team's flag and take it back to their territory. However, at Def Con, CTF is a computer security battle in which teams attack their opponents' computers and networks, while defending their own. The winning team is the one that steals the opposing team's flag from its machine or plants its own flag in its opponent's machine.

Yet another version of the game involves a series of multiple-choice questions, each worth a varying number of points based on the question's complexity. In this game, the teams do not confront each other; instead, they must answer the questions before their opponents do so.

Casinos aren't the only places in Las Vegas where people are playing games. Participants from all over the world travel to the city to attend Def Con and take playing computer games to a whole new level. It is a safe bet that many of them take home the skills they learned, and that their new abilities leave Las Vegas with them. **NL**

PATRICIA D. CAFFARATA'S biography can be found on page 27.



Skimmers: technology frequently used to steal credit card information from gas pumps and ATM machines.

Photo courtesy of Las Vegas Metro Police Department.

The 2016 program included some of the following:

- ❖ Sneaky PDF
- ❖ When Space Elephants Attack
- ❖ Three Generations of DoS (Department of State) Attacks
- ❖ Why Airport Security Can't Be Done Fast
- ❖ The History and Evolution of Computer Viruses
- ❖ Malware Freak Show 3
- ❖ Hacking Your Victims over Power Lines
- ❖ Are You In Yet?
- ❖ The Art of Trolling
- ❖ Bosses Love Excel, Hackers Too
- ❖ PIG: Finding Truffles without Leaving a Trace
- ❖ The Future of Cyber Travel: Legal Implications of the Evasion of Geolocation
- ❖ Security when Nano Seconds Count