

View News

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Overcoming food addiction

Former casino owner pens his first novel about his struggles

By AMANDA LLEWELLYN
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Former casino owner Gary Mahoney is a food addict, and he isn't ashamed to admit it.

In fact, the yo-yo dieter has embraced a long history of battling food issues with the publication of his first novel, "The Last Cookie Club," a fictionalized account of his struggles.

The novel tells the story of Larry Brennan, a character based on Mahoney, (most of the characters in the book are based on actual people) the successful owner of a neighborhood casino in Las Vegas, who enjoys a wonderful home life and financial success but battles a compulsive food addiction.

"This started as a form of therapy for me," he said. "I think that over the years, I have learned so much from retreats and self-education about weight loss. I think that's why I wanted to share my struggle. It's not that I don't know what to do. It's finding the will to actually do what you know is best for you. That's why it's an addiction."

Mahoney, who moved to Las Vegas in 1971 at age 23, met his wife of 38 years, Gail, and became a card dealer. He eventually purchased a dealer school and went on to own 13 throughout the country.

According to Mahoney, he did not begin to notice that food and weight were becoming an issue until his early 30s, when he began to find great success in business.

"There was a lot of stress," he said. "And although I exercised and stayed thin in my 20s, I began to notice disturbing trends in my 30s. My weight was erratic. I couldn't seem to control my eating. All it would take is one little emotional upset, although I didn't recognize those triggers at the time."

Mahoney owned and ran North Las Vegas casinos the Opera House and

the Silver Nugget from the late 1980s until 2007, when he sold both properties to focus on writing.

"It wasn't necessarily writing that I was or am passionate about," he said. "It is the topic about which I was writing."

As owner of these hometown casinos, Mahoney said he started Weight Release classes, where employees would have the opportunity to meet a few times per week to discuss the challenges of weight loss or maintenance and lean on one another.

"It was really great," he said. "There was some great coaching that went on in those sessions. And that was sort of my model for the cookie club idea. It's sort of like, all right, you know this behavior is destroying you. When are you going to have your last cookie?"

Gail Mahoney said she has read the book at least four times, and she believes anybody who has ever struggled with overcoming any type of addiction could gain insight from the characters profiled.

"Even if you don't struggle with addiction issues, it's a great read," she said. "You really care about these characters and you're invested."

Las Vegas resident Tammy Rouff read the book after getting a copy from a friend, and said she enjoyed taking the journey with the characters portrayed.

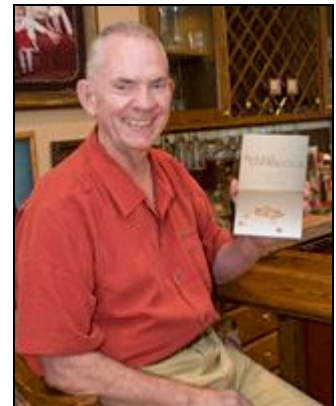
"I think the characters are very real," she said. "You either are one of them or you know them."

The book, published by Hardway Press, is available for purchase on amazon.com and www.lastcookieclub.com.

Mahoney said he believes his book will cause people to examine their own addictions and behaviors and hopes to



JERRY HENKEL/VIEW Gary Mahoney prepares a watermelon for breakfast at his home on July 30. Mahoney, a former casino owner, has a long history of struggling with food addiction and recently wrote "The Last Cookie Club."



JERRY HENKEL/VIEW Gary Mahoney wrote his first novel, "The Last Cookie Club," based on his struggles with food addiction.

be able to begin a sequel featuring the same characters in the next year.

"I want people who read the book to both laugh out loud and cry," he said. "I think if I can help people while realizing how to conquer my own demons, it's a win-win situation."

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