

From Sniptown... to Chairtown... to G-Vegas?

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By Mike Richard

It was a burning question asked of me for which I had no answer: ***“Why do people refer to Gardner as G-Vegas?”***

Sometimes it just sorta goes with the territory.

I mean, you write a weekly column titled “The Gardner Scene” and people automatically think you know just about everything there is to know when it comes to Gardner.

Now there are times that I impress even the stodgiest of curmudgeons when I can spew forth data, statistics and historical trivia from our fair city – even if I may not know the correct answer. I’ve always maintained that if you can say it quickly and with an air of certainty, most people will believe what you’re saying is true. At least they won’t challenge you.

However, even I couldn’t bluff an acceptable answer to a query posed to me by a long distance online reader of *The Gardner News* from Tucson, Arizona.

Kevin Keresey grew up on Green Street, was a 1973 graduate of Gardner High where he played football all four years, and worked part time at the IGA during his teenage years. He headed west in 1977 returning only about only a half dozen times since, but recently asked exactly how that nickname came to be.

I was stopped in my tracks. Certainly, over the years Gardner has had its share of unique monikers.

Long before Gardner was known as “The Chair City” it was referred to by the title “Sniptown,” while other references noted it as “Niptown.”

The reason for that nickname was because Gardner was formed by “taking a nip” out of the older surrounding towns of Winchendon, Ashburnham, Westminster and Templeton. At one time a pile of stones stood near the intersection of Central, School and Lynde streets marking a spot where the towns of Winchendon, Ashburnham and Westminster originally cornered together.

Once the furniture manufacturing business gained prominence in the community, Gardner took on the tag name of “Chairtown” and later – after becoming a municipality – “The Chair City.”

In addition, as you travel down Route 2 heading west just prior to entering Gardner a relatively new highway sign proclaims that section “The Gateway to the Mohawk Trail.”

Still another larger billboard on the fringes of the East Gardner Industrial Park welcomes travelers to “The Furniture Capital of New England,” which has also found its way into television commercials advertising our local factory outlets.

Yet nowhere is there a reference to this community being known as “G-Vegas.”

However, if memory serves, it was sometime in the early 1980s that the nickname “G-Vegas” first surfaced.

On the Entering Gardner sign on Route 2A in Westminster, a short distance across the street from Kay’s, someone with black spray paint once scrawled “G-Vegas” across the Gardner side.

It had to occur more than 25 years ago because, on the front cover of the Gardner High yearbook *Argus* 1984, there are a variety of words and phrases commonly used by members of the class. In big letters you'll see perhaps the first published use of the word "G-Vegas."

A Google search reveals that Gardner may not have been the first community to use that handle, as Greenville, N. C. publishes *G-Vegas Magazine*, heralded as "Greenville's fastest-growing magazine." It has special G-Vegas Groups such as "G-Vegas Girls" (the magazine's own version of MySpace) and a music project known as "G-Vegas Jams."

The Internet Urban Dictionary also has an entry for "G-Vegas" which, by definition is: "Also known as Greenville – an utterly boring city in the piedmont of South Carolina that is a mixture of uber-rich CEOs and rednecks. G-Vegas is surrounded on all sides by towns in which everyone is related, thus making it one of the only quasi-civilized places in north-western South Carolina."

While those searches told me nothing of Gardner's claim to G-Vegas fame, I felt it would be apropos to question some of the people employed at Gardner's Mecca of G-Vegas activity – Gardner City Hall.

However, with each query I seemed to become more and more uninformed. "Wish I could be of help, but I have no clue about the origins of G-Vegas," was the response I received from Rob Hubbard, Gardner's Director of Community Development and Planning.

Municipal Grounds Director Mike Gonyeo, while also gracious in defeat, had nothing to offer by way of explanation.

Calvin Brooks, the City Auditor, thought the name was originated by former *Gardner News* writer Ernie King in his Saturday columns for this paper.

Now while Ernie did add some spice to his writing with certain idioms that seeped their way into the local vernacular, G-Vegas was here before Ernie King slid behind the journalistic keyboard.

"Someone else told me that the nickname has been around for years because of all the slot machines that were allegedly in all the clubs (during our youth) and all the bingo games," Brooks added.

Robin Strazdas, the Assistant City Clerk and a 1982 graduate of Gardner High School had to defer to classmate Heather Dube who noted, "I do believe we referred to it as G-Vegas sarcastically because Vegas is so exciting and we were bored with Gardner and looking for excitement!"

Mayor Mark Hawke, also unaware of its origin, maintained that he could purchase a T-shirt that says G-Vegas at John's Sport Shop.

"The first time I remember hearing G-Vegas was when I was in high school," said Hawke, a 1990 graduate of Gardner High School. "I figured Gardner was called G-Vegas because we were the happening place compared to the surrounding towns."

So John's Sport Shop sells G-Vegas t-shirts and the Gardner Ale House has on its menu its popular G-Vegas nachos. However, still we're at a loss to explain the when and why of this local tag attached for so many years to our city.

It's time to put it out to you – the readers of *The Gardner News* – to perhaps shed some light on this local mystery.

If you have an idea as to when and why we became known as G-Vegas, please pass on your thoughts either through the email address or mailing address below.

We'll publish some of the better suggestions when this column next appears two weeks from today.

(Comments and suggestions for The Gardner Scene can be sent to Mike Richard at Rich0725@aol.com. or in writing c/o The Gardner News, 309 Central St. Gardner, MA 01440)