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Coins thrown in Las Vegas Strip fountains help charities

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The woman leaned against the rail in front of Bellagio's lake, and, with eyes closed, thumbed a quarter right into the water.

Her wish, like her name, she said, would have to remain a secret for it to come true.

No doubt, she asked for a bit of luck. Water features all along the Las Vegas Strip have served as repositories for coins (and other items) thrown by visitors hoping to earn a visit by Lady Luck in the town where it pays to be lucky. Literally.

But once that coin hits the water, what happens to it? Turns out, the coins from Strip fountains take an interesting journey starting from the well-wisher's wallet and often ending in the coffers of local charities. Some coins end up in the pockets of people who bravely, or foolishly, wade into the water, looking for a quick buck. There's even a video on YouTube that shows a man helping himself to coins in a Caesars fountain. A few coins even end up in the trash.



GARY THOMPSON/LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL
Bob Turgeon of the Caesars Palace maintenance department uses a vacuum to gather coins from the drained fountain in the Forum Shops. The money, \$10,000 a year on average, goes to the Simon Youth Foundation, which awards scholarships to kids. » [Buy this photo](#)

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Where the money goes "is probably not first and foremost on people's minds when they throw (coins), but they are helping people to better themselves," says Maureen Crampton, spokeswoman for the Forum Shops at Caesars. The shops have four fountains, including one on the street, that attract money like metal to a magnet.

Every few weeks, maintenance staff members drain the fountains and "harvest" the coins by the bucket. The money, \$10,000 a year on average, goes to the Simon Youth Foundation, which awards scholarships to kids with financial need or even parents who are pursuing a degree.

It's not as easy as taking the money out of the water and then giving it away, though. From the moment they're in fountains, the coins begin to corrode. Maintenance staff cleans them with vinegar and towels before counting the money, Crampton says.

The method for removing the money from the water and then cleaning it is handled differently by each MGM Resorts property, says company spokeswoman Yvette Monet.

People throw coins into the volcano feature at The Mirage, the harbor at New York-New York, Bellagio's lake and various water features at Mandalay Bay and Luxor.

The coins in the "New York Harbor" are collected once a year when operations staff members drain the harbor for New Year's Eve, Monet says. The money is cleaned and dried by the hard count staff in the casino cage and then donated to the Make a Wish Foundation.

Bellagio's lake is cleaned every few months. The staff that maintains and operates the fountains built a giant vacuum that is used to remove everything from the floor of the lake, Monet says. They sift the money and then place it into a cement mixer along with some towels. The friction cleans the coins.

Bellagio donated more than \$12,000 taken from the lake last year, with much of the money going to Habitat for Humanity. Other resorts within the company donate fountain money to the company foundation. The money is dispersed to various nonprofits that apply for grants, Monet says.

Two fountains in the Miracle Mile Shops at Planet Hollywood Resort yield thousands of charitable dollars each year. Opportunity Village and the Boys & Girls Club are two nonprofits that have received the mall's fountain money, says Russell Joyner, the mall's general manager.



Ken Beemer, an engineer at Planet Hollywood Resort, scoops up as much as \$800 in coins from one of the fountains in the Miracle Mile Shops. GARY THOMPSON/LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL
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Mall staff removes the coins on a monthly basis. Local organizations can apply to receive donations, but they are tasked with cleaning the coins, Joyner says. The money is collected and delivered by bucket. They circulate four to six buckets a month, with each valued between \$800 and \$1,200.

"The only requirement we have of them is to be able to sort and clean them on their own," Joyner says. "Whatever they're able to salvage is their donation."

Sometimes, coins aren't salvageable. They become too corroded or dirty to remain in circulation.

"There is a certain deterioration point for coins," Monet says. "We have found coins that are drawn out that are too old" or dirty to be saved.