# An Interview with Leron Gubler

By Chris Davison

*Leron Gubler is President and CEO of the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, whose mission is to promote and enhance the business, cultural, and civic well being of Hollywood. Many significant accomplishments can be credited to the Chamber since its founding in 1921, including world-famous landmarks such as the Hollywood Sign, the Hollywood Bowl, and of course the Walk of Fame.*

*With more than 90 years of Hollywood history and a glowing, glamorous legacy, the Chamber works to preserve the integrity of the past while also boldly moving into the future. I recently had a chance to sit down with Leron to discuss changing technologies, live-streaming of Walk of Fame induction ceremonies, and a new mobile app due to bow in Summer 2013.*

*And Muhammad Ali. He gets his own separate line, you'll see why below.*

**Can you tell us about your background and what made you want to work in Hollywood?**

**Leron Gubler:** My background is that my whole career has been in non-profit management, Chamber of Commerce management. I graduated from college with an MPA, a public administration degree, and came here right when Proposition 13 was passing. All of government was in panic mode and so there were no jobs in the public sector. I ended up getting a job with the Chamber of Commerce in Santa Monica. I was there a year and a half, and then went down to San Pedro, where I ran the Chamber for 12 years.

The opportunity arose to come here to Hollywood, where the Chamber was going through a difficult time. They had terminated three executives in three years and they were involved in several lawsuits, so it was a mess and they wanted to hire somebody who had a Chamber of Commerce background. Despite all the ills, Hollywood is the most famous brand in the world and so I figured that there's got to be a point where it turns around and there is opportunity. I took the chance and it's been a lot of fun for the past 20 years, celebrating my twentieth anniversary in September.

**How do you decide which stars go where on the Walk of Fame?**

**LG:** It's interesting and we try to have a little fun with it as well. We don't let the celebrities select their site but if they want to make a request we'll entertain it; everybody would be in front of the Chinese Theater or the Dolby Theater otherwise. We try to find locations that are meaningful, that have a connection to them or they're known for. For example, Jay Leno wanted to have his star at the corner of Hollywood and Highland because he was arrested there for vagrancy as a teenager, and so we agreed to that. Lately, we've been putting a lot of the music ones in front of the Musicians Institute, or in front of Capitol Records for people who were Capitol artists. For the Dolby Theater, we've started putting mostly Academy Award winners in that spot. Rip Taylor—we put him in front of a wig shop.

Ana Martinez, who is our producer of the Walk of Fame, is the one who recommends the locations and picks the locations. She usually tries to find if there's some fun little connection, she'll try to do it. Muhammad Ali did not want people walking on him and so his star is on a wall. Carol Burnett, hers is in front of what was the Warner Pacific Theater, because as a teenager she was an usherette there and got fired. About 10 years ago, Carol Burnett was building a new media room in her home and she asked the owners of the Theater if she could have the door that she was standing in front of when she got fired and so they came over and did a little presentation to her. There wasn't press or anything, I was there with Johnny Grant and they gave her the door and so now it's up at her house in Santa Barbara.

**What's the 411 on your new Walk of Fame app?**

**LG:** MediaMine, a media asset management company, is working right now on digitizing the data and creating an inventory, an index of everything. One of the biggest positives of this whole project for us is that we'll know what we have. We're a small staff with a lot of things happening, we move from one event onto the next, we don't have time to go through and do an inventory of every little item that's in each of the files. As part of this, MediaMine is going through every file and digitizing every document, and creating an index so that we know what we have, which will be great because someday I'd like to do a Walk of Fame museum, and so we start by knowing what we have. MediaMine is working on it and they have started the design as well, it'll probably be some time next summer before it's actually ready to be marketed

Others have tried to do Walk of Fame apps but we have the best records of anybody, as well as photographs and video and all of that. This'll be an official app and should be the most accurate of any. We found errors ourselves in our records over the years, when we were doing our website we found that the early records were just not very good and so we've had to go through every single one to verify in the files when they got their star. The original list of the first 1500 stars, there's some where there were questions, so we've done our research and we now know exactly what we have as far as induction dates.

**In your time in the business, what are some of the ways in which technology has changed the Chamber and Hollywood in general?**

**LG:** I can go back even further than that: when I first started out of college we were still using mimeograph machines, which was how we made copies before photocopiers came along. Then we had the first photocopiers, which used a waxy paper on a roll, they didn't use standard paper sheets, and there was a blade that would cut it.

Twenty years ago when I came here, the Chamber had a pretty archaic computer system. This was before there was a lot of off-the-shelf software designed for different organizations, for different purposes. The system here was horrible, trying to get it to do anything was just impossible. Getting the Chamber a dedicated system, a Chamber-designed software package, has made it a lot easier for data management. For other things, email has been revolutionary for organizations such as ours; we used to have to send out letters or postcards for meeting notices. Our postage bills are considerably less now than they were 20 years ago even though postage prices have gone up, and it's a lot easier and a lot quicker.

The quality of what we can do is now a lot better. Our newsletter is now a news magazine, we do a nice product in full color and it looks very professional. When I started here the cost of color was prohibitive and the design was much more amateurish-looking. In terms of our Member Directory, I anticipate that in the next few years we probably won't publish one anymore.  It's a nice book to put on a coffee table or to hand to a member-prospect but very few people actually use these anymore since they use the Internet. We try to upgrade as much as we can within our budget—we are a non-profit organization.

We now stream our **Walk of Fame (http://WalkOfFame.com)** induction ceremonies and we've been doing it less than a year. We previously would record it and put a little four-minute summary on our website and then the opportunity came up when Variety became our media partner and they offered to work with us to present live video-streaming, which was a deal we couldn't pass up. It's great that people can see the whole ceremony live and be a part of it. We recently inducted Gale Anne Hurd and it was fun, having James Cameron and Roger Corman also there, it was amazing. That's the thing about the Walk, it's not only the honorees but also the celebrities they bring with them that is so impressive.

As far as Hollywood, especially the motion picture industry, it's amazing how rapidly things have changed. For a long time, things didn't move that quick but now the technology is changing so much.

Every business has the same issues that we have and the same opportunities and so it's mainly staying on top of it. We've got Silicon Beach over here. We're actually doing a conference on the state of the entertainment industry. We're talking about runaway production and video piracy, new media and the opportunities of convergence between Silicon Valley and Hollywood. Tech companies are moving down here since they realize that Hollywood is the content provider; that it doesn't matter what you have in terms of technology, you need content. I think we're going to continue seeing the merger of those two worlds and I think Hollywood's well positioned to take advantage of it.

**Anything you would like to add?**

**LG:** The Walk of Fame is a huge resource for Hollywood and Los Angeles; it is the No. 1 tourist draw and attraction in Los Angeles County. It's because we do these ceremonies 24-30 times a year and it's constant

brand reinforcement. It's a huge marketing tool for Los Angeles, as well as something that people enjoy. It's a huge responsibility for the Chamber as the administrator to preserve the Walk, to preserve the integrity of it and to keep it for future generations. We're proud to have been able to have that responsibility and look forward to maintaining it in future.

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