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CUISINE IMPROVES THE FAN EXPERIENCE

HB2 and a hurricane fallout behind them, venues in the Carolinas and Georgia are feeding big crowds again

by BRAD WEISSBERG

HB2 took the wind out of the live-touring sails in North Carolina last year, taking it, and sister-state South Carolina, down four percent from the previous year. With the repeal of HB2, North Carolina is slowly climbing out of the downturn the 'bathroom bill' brought; South Carolina is also on an uptick. Neighbor-state Georgia is swinging along nicely, showing a healthy 13 percent increase from last year. Everyone in the region is glad to see HB2 go and most are hopeful its repeal will satisfy acts and fans who were boycotting the region. (Clockwise from top left) Mighty Mo, the organ at Fox Theatre, Atlanta; Foreigner at Crown Complex, Fayetteville, N.C.; the main level and inside the theater at Fox Theatre (Photo credit: Johnathan Phillips); and Jason Aldean at Macon (Ga.) Centreplex, Coliseum and Auditorium.

ob Klaus, GM, DURHAM (N.C.) PERFORMING ARTS CENTER (DPAC), said the venue had its second highest attendance since opening in 2008. "We had a record number of concerts, comedy shows and special events and our Broadway shows continue to help us rank among the top theater venues in America," he said.

Klaus said having "something for everyone" was the key to DPAC's success. Highlights included three sold-out shows by Chris Rock, as well as headliners Joe Bonamassa, Bob Dylan, Tony Bennett, Earth, Wind & Fire and Il Divo.

Broadway favorites included "The King and I," "Finding Neverland," and "Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas Musical."

Overall, the average ticket price among

the 220-plus events was \$55-\$60. "As VIP packages become more and more popular, CONTINUED ON **PAGE 20** →

TOPSTOPS

Based on concert and event grosses from Aug. 1, 2016 - July 31, 2017, as reported to Venues Today

	VENUE, LOCATION	NO. OF SEATS	TOTAL GROSS	ATTENDANCE	SHOWS		
1.	Philips Arena, Atlanta	20,000	\$34,867,200	549,945	62		
2.	Fox Theatre, Atlanta	4,678	\$32,064,545	530,255	180		
3.	Infinite Energy Arena, Duluth	13,100	\$19,270,837	238,034	31		
4.	Cobb Energy Perf. Arts Centre, Atlanta	2,750	\$10,467,229	163,837	101		
5.	Verizon Wireless Amph., Alpharetta	12,000	\$5,287,763	93,752	10		
6.	Lakewood Amphitheatre, Atlanta	18,937	\$4,744,719	133,834	10		
7.	Bell Auditorium, Augusta	2,690	\$2,784,419	54,476	35		
8.	Chastain Park Amphitheatre, Atlanta	6,900	\$2,759,065	38,470	9		
9.	James Brown Arena, Augusta	8,677	\$1,307,826	38,474	25		
10.	Wolf Creek Amphitheatre, Atlanta	5,300	\$838,721	15,813	4		
Compiled by Monique Potter, HotTickets@venuestoday.com							

GEORGIA | 2017

TOPSTOPS NORTH & SOUTH CAROLINA | 2017

Based on concert and event grosses from Aug. 1, 2016 - July 31, 2017, as reported to Venues Toda,

	VENUE, LOCATION	NO. OF SEATS	TOTAL GROSS	ATTENDANCE	SHOWS			
1.	Durham (N.C.) Performing Arts Center	2,800	\$23,623,984	427,026	198			
2.	Spectrum Center, Charlotte, N.C.	20,200	\$14,749,040	294,672	50			
3.	Colonial Life Arena, Columbia, S.C.	18,000	\$8,589,963	176,773	30			
4.	Peace Center, Greenville, S.C.	2,100	\$7,983,610	114,077	83			
5.	North Charleston (S.C.) Coliseum	14,000	\$4,508,543	68,107	12			
6.	PNC Music Pavilion, Charlotte	18,500	\$4,151,697	118,222	9			
7.	Bon Secours Wellness Arena, Greenville, S.C.	15,000	\$3,933,570	62,803	8			
8.	Greensboro (N.C.) Coliseum	23,500	\$3,773,009	71,005	7			
9.	PNC Arena, Raleigh	20,000	\$2,780,756	41,876	4			
10.	Crown Complex, Fayetteville, N.C.	10,880	\$2,213,236	120,406	62			
11.	Charlotte (N.C.) Metro Credit Union Amph.	5,000	\$1,959,273	66,175	15			
12.	Florence (S.C.) Civic Center	9,500	\$1,833,983	62,545	26			
13.	Red Hat Amphitheater, Raleigh, N.C.	5,990	\$1,611,223	49,153	12			
14.	Charleston (S.C.) Music Hall	906	\$1,501,107	32,631	53			
15.	Coastal Credit Union Music Park, Raleigh, N.C.	20,500	\$1,367,209	48,542	5			
Compiled by Monique Potter, HotTickets@venuestoday.com								

CUISINE IMPROVES... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19 we're seeing top prices grow, but we always try and balance those with special pricing for students, seniors and audiences who buy multishow packages like our very popular SunTrust Broadway at DPAC season ticket package," said Klaus.

This past year marked DPAC's first year with a new food and beverage provider — Spectra. "Per caps were up by about 10 percent," he said. "We love the new teamwork with our local manager, Affonso Jefferson, and with Spectra's regional team headed by Doug Drewes and Dave Anderson."

Among the new products introduced were grab-and-go sandwiches, which have been a huge hit, along with added dessert items including cake pops and cupcakes.

DPAC has an operating agreement with the city of Durham that includes a dedicated facility fee on every ticket sold for improvements and maintenance. "This summer we upgraded our seating and carpet throughout the venue as part of a \$1.8 million improvement project," said Klaus.

Spectra took over management of the **MACON** (Ga.) **CENTREPLEX**, Coliseum &

Auditorium last year. "We did really well this year," said David Aiello, GM. "Now that we've been here a year, the industry is starting to notice that Macon is selling tickets." Aiello said the center saved the county \$700,000 on their yearly budgeted deficit, compared to prior years.

Hot shows included Vince Gill, ZZ Top, Mike Epps, Justin Moore, Jason Aldean and Kevin Hart.

The operating budget last year was \$1.3 million. Tickets ranged from \$30-\$80.

One of Spectra's priorities when they arrived was putting together a five-year capital improvement plan. They've already updated infrastructure and have issued an RFP for new lighting and a new basketball floor. The fiveyear budget for improvements is \$5 million for the coliseum, and \$12 million for the auditorium.

Macon Centreplex recently won back the rights to host High School State Basketball Tournaments. "We're expecting them back at the end of the year," he said.

F&B is similarly picking up speed and done in-house. "We renovated concession stands," he said. "When we got here, there were only two fully functioning stands and now we are up to four." New POS systems, provided by Bypass, were also installed. In the auditorium, new kitchen equipment has been ordered. "This will give us the opportunity to increase our catering operation and increase our revenue."

Specialty drinks were a hot item last year. For Kevin Hart they created "Seriously Funny," which was gin, apple pucker, sour mix and pineapple; Fantasia fans got to purchase "The Definition," which was vodka, peach and apple schnapps and lemonade; Mary J. Blige guests were served "Real Love," a combination of double crown apple and choice of mixer; and Keith Sweat & Johnny Gill supporters got to sip on a "My My Mai Tai."

Scott Johnson, deputy director, GREENSBORO (N.C.) COLISEUM COMPLEX, said they also had "a very good year." He believes they were "up marginally" and cites HB2 as the reason for the solid, if not spectacular, returns.

Justin Moore, Lee Brice, Twenty One Pilots, Florida Georgia Line, Winter Jam and Eric Church were standouts. Guns N' Roses played the first-ever BB&T Field concert and sold-out.

The budget is "around \$9 million to run eight venues on the complex." There were 1,100 events spread over the venues. A new \$79.5-million performing arts center is currently being built and will open in 2019. The new facility is a public/private enterprise. "The city is in for \$40 million and the other \$39.5 million is coming from the private sector," said Johnson.

Spectra is the venue concessionaire. "Per caps have been going up," he said. "Beer continues to be the big driver at concerts." New concessions include a Popeye's Chicken and Moe's Southwestern Grill continues to be a big seller. The complex uses Bypass for payments and Oui Vend for merchandise sales.

The complex is almost at 100 percent usage of wanding and they've purchased 20 new magnetometers, all portable units, from Ceia, which cost \$110,000.

"We were one of the cities that was most CONTINUED ON **PAGE 22** →



Web: GreensboroColiseum.com & LJVM.com

VT SPOTLIGHT

CUISINE IMPROVES... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

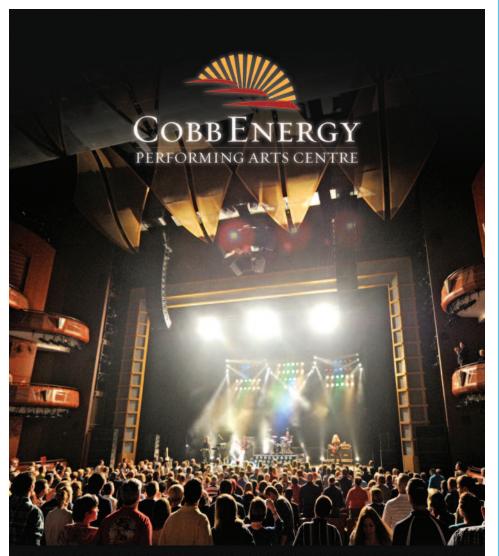
impacted by Hurricane Matthew last year," said Jim Grafstrom, GM, Crown Complex, Fayetteville, N.C. "We faced cancellations and rescheduling; it was absolutely the biggest challenge we faced last year." One of the cancellations was psychic Theresa Caputo. "Of course the running joke here and on Facebook was that she should have known ahead of time and warned us."

Still, the complex achieved their budget for the year. "We were proud of the fact that

we could manage that even with many of the residents facing financial hardship and given disposable income in the market was severely impacted," he said.

Big shows were Foreigner, Luke Bryan, Lauren Hill, Hall & Oats and Vince Gill. Ticket prices ranged from \$20-\$125. The operating budget for the complex was \$4.6 million.

The tenant hockey team, Fayetteville Fireantz, were bought and renamed CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 \rightarrow



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MEETING PLANNER MEETUP

Downtown Durham, N.C., has gone through a dramatic revitalization, according to Rebecca Bolton, GM, Durham (N.C.) Convention Center. "It went from very little entertainment in the downtown core to lots of people walking around, an increasing number of small privately-owned businesses and three new boutique hotels around the convention center."

To take advantage of the new Durham, Bolton and her team have been working closely with the hoteliers and restaurant, bar and small shop owners to attract more customers for the convention center and surrounding businesses.

"We go on sales calls and to trade shows together," explained Bolton. "We tie our partners together and try to convince prospective clients that Durham is the place to come for small to medium conventions. Durham has a lot of unique and fun things to do and is a good place to visit."

Taking the team effort a little further, Durham Convention Center held an event strictly for event planners. "All the guests were state and regional meeting planners and we had as many hosts as guests," she said. "It was an effort to showcase our partnerships."

The one-day meetup consisted of a meet-and-mingle and it was "roped around basketball." Fifteen-foot bigscreen TV's were put up that showed North Carolina basketball games; the whole room was lit up green because it was on St. Patrick's Day; and there were games and food and a basketball hoop set up. "If people made a basket they got raffle tickets; it made it interactive."

It didn't cost a lot. The Durham partners all had to bring a "substantial giveaway like a weekend stay with a spa package and, throughout the day, we gave the stuff away."

Bolton said it was a runaway success and "it brought us new business."

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Colonial Life Arena



WHAT WOULD YOU SAVE?

On the heels of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, we asked our Southern state spotlight venue operators what they'd grab on the way out the door, aside from people, if they knew they had 20 minutes before a flood was going to hit.

BOB KLAUS, GM, DPAC, DURHAM, N.C.

My laptop and phone.

DAVID AIELLO, GM, MACON (GA.) CENTREPLEX, COLISEUM & AUDITORIUM

Pictures of my daughter Sofie.

SCOTT JOHNSON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, GREENSBORO (N.C.) COLISEUM COMPLEX

My University of Wake Forest diploma.

JIM GRAFSTROM, GM, CROWN COMPLEX, FAYETTEVILLE, N.C.

Leadership awards that I've gotten from the company and the community.

REBECCA BOLTON, GM, DURHAM (N.C.) CONVENTION CENTER

I don't have anything that can't be reprinted. I'd grab my cell phone to help facilitate contacting the rest of my team.

ALLAN VELLA, GM, FOX THEATRE, ATLANTA

I'd save a paddle that the ushers carry around that says "hush y'all" which we use instead of ringing the bell. I'd also save one of the doorman's top hats.

TREY FAEZELL, EVP, PROGRAMMING, PHILIPS ARENA, ATLANTA My signed U2 poster.

LEXIE BOONE, SENIOR AGM, COLONIAL LIFE ARENA, COLUMBIA, S.C.

Family photos and some other historical industry photos I've taken over the last 15 years.

SANDIE AARON, MANAGING DIRECTOR, COBB ENERGY PERFORMING ARTS CENTER, ATLANTA

The hard drive from my computer. I'd be lost without it.

DONNA JULIAN, SVP, ARENA AND EVENT OPERATIONS/GM, SPECTRUM CENTER, CHARLOTTE, N.C.

A framed version of a quote I love from Teddy Roosevelt I call 'Daring Greatly" and some industry awards.

CUISINE IMPROVES... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22 Fayetteville Marksman. "We signed them to a five-year deal, and we're excited to see what the rebranding will bring," Grafstrom said.

The F&B contract is currently in the RFP process; the venue has been with Centerplate since 1997. "The Cumberland County Civic Commission chose to go to RFP to make sure they have the best deal in place and the best service for our customers," said Grafstrom. "We are looking for innovation in our products, localization, fresh, and affordable. We want to stay on the leading edge of the trends."

The coliseum is celebrating its 20th anniversary, the expo hall has been active for 30 years and the theater and arena are in their 50th year of operation. "With the buildings being so old, we are definitely looking at major capital improvements," he said. "We're currently doing a needs assessment."

Although slightly down from last year, Allan Vella, GM, **FOX THEATRE**, Atlanta, said, "It was a very good year. We were very fortunate with good programming and good response."

Comedy and Broadway were strong. Hot shows were Brian Wilson, Louis C.K., Chance The Rapper, Cirque Holidays, "Matilda," and a new eSports event in conjunction with Turner Sports. "The tickets blew-out when we sent the first email," he said. Twelve thousand tickets were sold over three days.

Last year Fox Theatre went in a new F&B direction by hiring chef Michael Giovanni. "People are looking for upscale items today; we reduced the quantity but increased the quality," said Vella, referring mostly to alcohol. "We introduced upscale vodkas and whiskeys and local brews." Fox Theatre also added an app that allows in-seat ordering.

The Marquee Club, a new premium space, will open in the fall. "It cost several million dollars and opens up a part of the historic structure that revisits a terrace on the roof, a 1920's feature," he said.

Vella is looking forward to hosting Broadway hit "Hamilton." Subscriptions increased 100 percent, he said.

"It was a great year," said Trey Feazell, EVP, programming, **PHILIPS ARENA**, Atlanta. "We were up in revenue, up in shows; it was one of our best years ever."

Highlights were Bon Jovi, Radiohead, Red Hot Chili Peppers and the Weeknd.

Feazell said the biggest trend he's seen is "a lot more solid acts hitting the road."

Philips Arena is currently undergoing a CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 \rightarrow

Spectrum Center

THANK YOU!

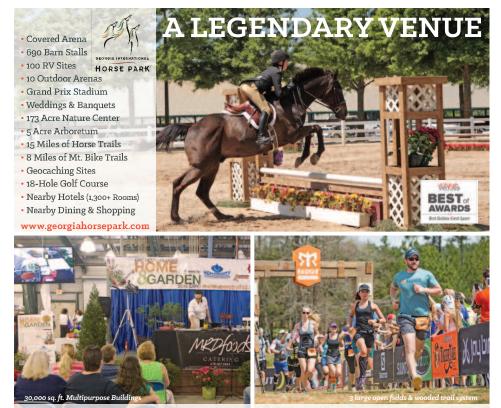
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CUISINE IMPROVES... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24 \$200-million renovation project. "We're currently in the first phase, which is demo," he said. "We closed the building in June and we'll open back up in October."

Phase two, cleaning up, is next. Phase three, starting in April, will see the venue shutting down again until October 2018. "We'll reopen with a totally transformed building," he said. "There will be new clubs, a revamped food program and unique new concepts like a Killer Mike barbershop and Swing Suites, which will have Top Golf simulators in them and a Zac Brown-branded bar." F&B is provided by Levy Restaurants.

"It was the best year in the history of the arena," said Lexie Boone, senior AGM, **COLONIAL LIFE ARENA**, Columbia, S.C. "We had more shows and great acts."

Red Hot Chili Peppers, Stevie Nicks, Luke Bryan and Carrie Underwood were standouts.

The arena changed concessionaires on July 1, replacing Centerplate with Aramark.

"Aramark took over the concessions for all of athletics," he said. "They hit the ground running and have replaced the technology and POS systems, and we're going through a process of rebranding."

Capital improvements include a new center-hung scoreboard and a new 360-degree curved ribbon display. "We did a multimedia rights deal with IMG last year, and we're also upgrading some of the static signage," he said.

Boone was also thrilled with the performance of the arena's basketball tenants, the men's and women's Gamecocks. "We had tremendous success with our teams this year; the men's team made it to the Final Four and the women's team won the National Championship."

Colonial Life Arena was awarded the NCAA first and second rounds for 2019.

Sandie Aaron, managing director, **COBB ENERGY PERFORMING ARTS CENTER**, Atlanta, said, "We did very well last year. We surpassed 2015-2016." Aaron believes the number of ticketed events, 168, up by 13 from the previous year, was responsible for the bump.

The PAC expanded the diversity of their events last year. "We had a 3 Doors Down show and over 70 percent were first time ticket buyers," she said, delighted. "We feel like we've expanded our reach."

Comedy did well last year, as did their tenants, the opera and ballet, which each did four productions. Aaron was surprised by the CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 \rightarrow

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GOOD RIDDANCE TO HB2

North Carolina's now infamous HB2, known as "the bathroom bill," had a major impact on the state with repercussions ranging from canceled concerts to the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) pulling games out of the state.

The bill was repealed in April and replaced with a toned-down version. Whether the slimmed-down repeal satisfied boycotting acts and fans and brought back business is still open to debate.

"We got hit hard last fall," said Rebecca Bolton, GM, Durham (N.C.) Convention Center. "I've heard people say 'it's changed but it's still not 100 percent acceptable,' and there are still a lot of opinions about what's happened with it."

During the time the bill was in place, the city of Durham used print and media to campaign that "we are all welcoming to everyone in this community," she said.

"We had several cancellations due to HB2," said Donna Julian, SVP, arena and event operations/GM, Spectrum Center, Charlotte, N.C. "We had to get creative. We did some lower bowl shows, different sizing of shows to make up for it." Julian said hosting the Big 3 basketball tournament "made up for some of the losses from losing NCAA events."

"We respect the entertainers' positions," she said. "Things appear to be calming down and we're looking forward to getting back to normal following the repeal." Julian credits "the variety of events" with getting them through the HB2 crisis.

Bob Klaus, GM, DPAC, Durham, N.C., said the venue "never really lost any shows due to HB2" and that "many of the shows we host felt that appearing in North Carolina and using that appearance as a chance for advocacy was the more productive response; several performers donated significant proceeds to local groups who were opposed to the legislation."

"We had cancellations because of HB2 earlier in the year," said Scott Johnson, deputy director, Greensboro (N.C.) Coliseum Complex. "But we were able to salvage some shows and book others before the end of the fiscal year."

"Things are starting to get back to normal," he said. "We're in talks with Cirque du Soleil to return, and we're getting back NCAA men's and women's basketball."

An Eric Church concert at Greensboro (N.C.) Coliseum drew a sold-out crowd of 20,313.

CUISINE IMPROVES... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26 success of three sold-out K-pop shows and sold-out shows for YouTube stars imomoso-hard and Dan TDM.

F&B went well and "we really tried to be demographically sensitive," said Aaron. "We started using unique vendors and we've tried expanding the offerings."

Capital improvements included a new HVAC system. There are plans in place for new carpeting.

It was the center's 10th anniversary, which was celebrated with "10 years, 10 Successes: A Decade in the Spotlight." In their Marquee magazine, they highlighted a different success story each month. "One story highlighted a resident tenant; one story highlighted partnerships and collaborations; one was on sponsorships," said Aaron. "It culminated in September with an open-house birthday bash featuring the opera and ballet."

"It was a great year," said Donna Julian, SVP, arena and event operations/GM, **SPECTRUM CENTER**, Charlotte, N.C. "We were up."

Highlights included the Kellogg's Gymnastics tour, Red Hot Chili Peppers, the last run of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, Neil Diamond and Kendrick Lamar. Julian said that the "mix of events" helped them succeed, and she liked "the diversity of events that came through last year."

F&B is provided by Levy Restaurants. "We're always trying to come up with new things," she said. Innovative ideas put to the test were an in-house pretzel concept called The Twist, and a French-fries-in-a-brown-bag concept. "We offered different seasonings and you shake 'em and go." Craft beers were also big at Spectrum Center last year.

A five-year, \$27.5 million, capital improvement plan is in its second year. Last year's improvements included a new scoreboard, two four-corner boards and two LED rings in the bowl. The center also repurposed some of the old boards and put them in the main lobby. Over the summer, they swapped the locations of their fan shop and box office. "The fan shop is now on the main lobby and will have a Jordan-brand section," she said.

Julian is excited by the return of NCAA basketball in March, which looked to be in jeopardy due to HB2, and the 2019 National Basketball Association All-Star game and men's Atlantic Coast Conference Championships. "Things are looking good," she said.



AFT

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