

venues

TODAY



Hall of Headlines 2017

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HAPPENING SOON >> Western Fairs Association Convention, Anaheim (Calif.) Marriott, Jan. 3-6
>> INTIX, Hilton Baltimore, Jan. 28-29 >> Stadium Managers Association, Hotel Del Coronado, San Diego, Calif., Feb. 4-8 >> Pollstar Live! 2018, InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown, Feb. 6-8.



18 The Red River Showdown between Oklahoma and Texas at the State Fair of Texas' Cotton Bowl in Dallas. Fairs offer a diversity of events.



ON THE COVER

Founder Linda Deckard reflects on the past — and contemplates the future— as she gazes upon the last issue of *Venues Today* before it relaunches as *VenuesNow* next year. Hall of Headlines winners framed here, clockwise from top left, include: Jerry Goldman, Maureen Ginty, Kerry Painter, Chris Verros, Albert Fera, Sandy Dunn, Peter Luukko and Tim Leiweke.

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HALL OF HEADLINES 2017

NEWS



Taking Risk Vs. Chasing Fees

Peter Luukko and Tim Leiweke lean on experience
with launch of OVG Facilities

by LINDA DECKARD

"Our foundation will be bricks and mortar," said Peter Luukko, president of Oak View Group's Arena Alliance and now helping the [possibly] newest OVG division, OVG Facilities, with Tim Leiweke, founder and chairman, OVG.

The two have a long history in private management of venues, Luukko through years with SMG and Comcast-Spectacor, where he formed Global Spectrum, which is now Spectra, and Lieweke through establishing AEG Facilities. Both in prior and current lives have managed venues as well.

That's the key to this new venture, which officially launched with purchase of Pinnacle Venue Services in October of this year, bringing more veterans of private management, Tom Paquette and Doug Higgons, into the OVG Facilities fold.

That launch and OVG Facilities' pledge to positively disrupt the sports and entertainment industry with new thinking based on broad experience secured the *Venues Today* Hall of Headlines Award for News for Luukko and Leiweke.

In some ways, this is "the more things change, the more they stay the same," but Luukko points out that OVG Facilities is "a different platform. When we started Global Spectrum, we were doing it out of the arena, First Union Center at the time [now Wells Fargo Center, Philadelphia], and we had the platform



of the National Hockey League (NHL) team and National Basketball League (NBA) team. We were going to add accounts and really looking to get into primarily the fee business.”

Chasing the fee business is pretty much 99 percent of municipal bidding, Luukko added, “and that was really our niche. The difference here is that we’re well capitalized by our founders, Tim, Irving [Azoff] and MSG [Madison Square Garden], and we will not only be bidding on the fee business but our foundation will be around bricks and mortar,” Luukko said.

Luukko and Leiweke are working hard on two brick and mortar projects that will anchor that foundation, the rebuild of KeyArena, Seattle, which OVG has been awarded, and construction of a new Islanders arena in Belmont Park, New York, which OVG will manage for the group which won the bid to build it this month.

Even in the fee business, they will be creative, willing to take risk and up the ante, Leiweke said, lauding OVG’s luck at having Luukko leading the charge with his experience and knowledge, along with the fact Leiweke personally has been in venue management more than 30 years. The combination, along with purchase of Pinnacle, gives OVG Facilities “instant infrastructure.” Now they’ve added veteran venue manager Steve Mattson in the Northwest, based in Seattle.

The goal? “To make OVG Facilities the biggest venue management company in the world, and I welcome the challenge,” Leiweke said. Two-year-old OVG has been on a growth

spree second to none and includes, full disclosure, purchase of *Venues Today* and *Pollstar*.

Leiweke said the strategy is “resources and relationships” and OVG is “100 percent committed. Yes, we will invest money. Yes, we will bid on projects, some of which are underutilized. We like taking risk and sharing the upside. That’s our model.”

OVG Facilities will bid on The Greek, Los Angeles, for instance, Leiweke said. It will be in the mix when contracts go out to bid and Leiweke guaranteed that OVG Facilities will “grow quickly.”

Luukko concurred wholeheartedly. In some bids, the approach will be “we have an alternative. We can guarantee your bottom line and/or put capital into your business. We will look to step up and make those financial guarantees,” Luukko said, though he declined to name examples yet.

Published reports have them working on a potential booking deal with Rupp Arena, Lexington, Ky.; and a rebuild of the Norfolk (Va.) Scope, which is in pricing mode.

“The key I’ve learned over the years is you have to be a good listener and tailor your deals to the needs of the client. The key is to be flexible,” Luukko said. “This is strictly management, you don’t need capital? Fine, we’ll be a manager. If you’re looking for \$10 million to put into the building, we can propose something long-term for capital needs.

“Tim is the greatest I’ve ever seen at seeing more opportunity than maybe others do. That’s the positive disruption,” Luukko said.

OVG Facilities also benefits from everything OVG, which is a many-faceted company already, including security and sponsorship divisions. “We have the capital, but also the creativity and obviously the music angle,” Luukko said. “We have Irving Azoff as an owner. And then, on our professional sports side, even though we don’t own a team, obviously Tim, myself and others have great relationships in all the leagues, so I think we have that covered.”

Higsons has seen that dynamic phenomenon that is becoming OVG Facilities firsthand since he sold his company and says selling to OVG Facilities is “great. Being part of an organization with Tim and Peter opens doors to opportunities we just didn’t have. We’ve only been part of the organization for two months and there are a lot of irons in the fire.”

Luukko is one of Higsons’ mentors and Higsons says Luukko’s leadership skills are exemplary. “There really isn’t a challenge he hasn’t seen at some point.” Leiweke “brings passion and optimism and vision to the mix,” Higsons added, noting, “we’re getting the band back together in some ways.”

Luukko loves that most of the people in OVG Facilities started from the bottom and worked their way up. They’ve learned from mistakes and know all the ingredients needed to bake a successful deal. People make great companies, Luukko said.

“That’s the reward for people being in this business so long,” Luukko said: relationships and resources.



HALL OF HEADLINES 2017

NEWS



Exciting Times for Centerplate

Chris Verros to helm company bought by Sodexo

by LINDA DECKARD

To Chris Verros, purchase of Centerplate by Sodexo was the perfect matchup, not just because of the powerful potential of being part of a \$22-billion company but also because of what it means to Centerplate employees.

"I've always been a people person. I like to get to know the people who work in the field because that's where I came from – I was a dishwasher, a waiter, bartender and server. I've done all those things. I have a real appreciation for the people who work in this organization because we're a team," said Verros, who is currently CEO of Centerplate and tapped to be president when the acquisition is complete.

In late November, Sodexo agreed to purchase Centerplate for \$675 million from current owner Olympus Partners. Verros' role in that deal and in the combined companies' futures qualified him for a 2017 *Venues Today* Hall of Headlines Award for News, though the November announcement and award came after the original subscribers' vote.

Verros has spent his whole life in the restaurant/food and beverage business. "It's in my blood, my father was a restaurateur. Sunday mornings as a kid, I used to go down with my father to the restaurant to sweep the floor. I couldn't wait to get there. I couldn't believe people dropped so much money – probably \$1.25 a day in nickels, pennies and sometimes a quarter. When I was a little older, I realized my dad was going around ahead of me and dropping coins."



His father's strategy worked. Verros considered no other career and, during his illustrious rise, he has been directly involved in four food company acquisitions, this last one at the forefront. It started when Fanfare, a start up company owned by Jerry Moses which he helped start, was sold to Fine Host Corp. Verros was president of the Fine Host Recreation and Leisure Division.

"Then we sold to Aramark," he said. It was 2002, and Verros did not go as the company went. He was tempted to join Aramark, but he also wanted to stay in Boston so he called Joe O'Donnell, his other partner at Fanfare who also owned Boston Culinary Group (Boston Concessions at the time) and asked for a job.

"I was thinking that eventually Joe would want to sell, but I knew Joe from the mid-80s and knew how important that company was to him," Verros recalled.

He found the right opportunity in Centerplate, which bought Boston Culinary Group and kept most of the team. Verros became president and O'Donnell chairman of the board.

Centerplate originally was owned by private equity firm Kohlberg. Two or three years after Verros arrived, they sold to Olympus Partners.

Truth in business is that private equity has goals, usually three to five years out. "We were not for sale; however, we were approached by a banker representing Sodexo who said we have a company that's very inter-

ested in purchasing you, would you be interested in having those conversations? It was a number of months, lots of meetings, lots of diligence. The process has been very thoughtful and very detail oriented; there's been a lot of work behind the scenes," Verros said.

Verros believes Sodexo and Centerplate match up culturally almost perfectly. "Our mantra is 'We make it better to be there through memorable experiences' and Sodexo's is quality of life via services 'creating memorable sports and leisure services for the client and consumers.'" Neither company is about one person; both care about employees.

Sodexo is also trying to build their footprint in North America and "we're the perfect company to help them do that," Verros said.

Centerplate's relationship with clients doesn't have a secret sauce. It's about "making sure the customer feels good about us as a provider, making sure you do all the things you say you'll do. We don't over promise but always try to over deliver," Verros said. "We try to do the little things. It always comes back to people, the right people in the right places with the support services behind them."

Peter Luukko, Oak View Group, who also oversees one of Centerplate's biggest arena clients, BB&T Center, Sunrise, Fla., can attest to that.

"Chris has the uncanny ability to listen to the needs of the client and find solutions that give everybody the ability to succeed," Luukko said. "I always appreciate that Chris and Joe

remember my Massachusetts roots and have a Lobster Roll served at every meeting we have. Chris has worked his way up from the entry level of the business, and it shows when dealing with the detailed needs of his clients."

Consolidation in the concessions business is a constant, dating back to Verros' first experience working for Ogden Food Services, which was acquired by Aramark; just the multiples have changed.

And the goals remain the same. "It's still about the deliverable and service in the end. Certainly the expectations are higher and the service standards are higher and offerings are a little more extravagant. But it still comes down to delivering on those expectations," Verros said. "At the end of the day, you have to put a really great meal in front of folks and deliver it with a friendly face and a good, clean environment."

This sale is targeted to close by the end of the year, though there is no specific date. How will the sale impact Centerplate?

"It will be Centerplate supercharged," Verros said.

"That's why it's exciting for me personally. We were not a small company, we generate \$1 billion, but now you go to a company that generates \$22 billion and has services all over the world. Just think of the opportunities it opens up for the people who work within our organization at every level. To me that's a huge, huge win for people in our organization and that's what I'm looking forward to most."





HALL OF HEADLINES 2017

CONTENT



Tricks of the Trade

Experience and connections are essential
to Jerry Goldman's success

by **BRAD WEISSBERG**

Jerry Goldman wears many hats. As AGM at SMG-managed U.S. Bank Stadium, Minneapolis, he's in charge of all of the stadium revenue and responsible for everything from marketing to coordination with concessionaire Aramark and ticket provider Ticketmaster and the box office, but it's in his role as head of bookings that Goldman found his niche, and for those efforts Goldman has received *Venues Today's* Hall of Headlines Bookings Award.

In 2017, Goldman secured four huge stadium shows and 600 other events; booked the Summer X Games and 2020 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Wrestling Championships; and the crown jewel of events—Super Bowl 2018—is coming in February.

Locking in Luke Bryan and Metallica to open the venue proved Goldman knew the tricks of the trade: experience and contacts.

"We had Luke Bryan, but we needed a show," recalled Goldman. "Metallica had not played in the states in seven years. They were thinking about playing arenas. We thought maybe we could convince them they could fill a stadium. We reached out to the Frank brothers [Frank Productions] and they're good friends with Q Prime, Metallica's people."

"Metallica sold out in 10 minutes," said a tickled Goldman. "The concert was so successful, the band turned the tour into a stadium package."



Scoring Metallica is a perfect example of Goldman's philosophy of "focusing on things that are unique."

"One of the good things about Minneapolis is that it's a great concert market," said Goldman, "but there are only a handful of artists who can sell 50,000 tickets. So I looked for the biggest, best acts that were touring, that I could lure to play here."

With only a handful of acts to compete for, Goldman wound up with major gets.

Guns N' Roses, Coldplay and U2 all played and, combined, pulled 147,000 fans into the facility.

"This is very much a relationship business," stressed Goldman, who spends his day "on the phone with promoters and agents and managers. Staying in contact with people and staying close to Live Nation, AEG, the Frank Brothers and other players is the key."

"There are many different options in our market," he explained. "They can play Target Field or TFC Bank Stadium or here." Of the three, U.S. Bank Stadium is the only one with a roof and Goldman plays the weather-card to great advantage. "It's always 70 degrees in here," he tells potential clients.

Goldman went after X Games and the NCAA Wrestling Championships aggressively even though neither have ever been hosted by a National Football League (NFL) stadium.

"We got the whole city behind us to get the contracts," he shared. "We worked in conjunction with Sports Minneapolis and other

inter-city agencies and pushed hard."

X-Games brought 30,000 people to the building and was a huge success. The contract was for two years. Goldman wrangled the NCAA Wrestling contract by "pitching a concept that they would have everything under one roof."

As if major concerts, Minnesota Vikings home football games and 125 days of baseball

make sure he is not only on the minds of the promoters but the agents as well. He has made sure U.S. Bank Stadium is always in the conversation for a stop."

"He sees the vision of an event others might not see and manages to convince others that his concept will see a jump in ticket sales and deliver an unprecedented experience."

Talty is even more impressed that

"We got the whole city behind us to get the contracts." — JERRY GOLDMAN

weren't plenty on the plate, U.S. Bank Stadium hosts everything from business meetings to bar mitzvahs, an extraordinary amount of bookings for a sales team of three, including Goldman.

Goldman's best day was having U2 play the building. His worst was losing a show he thought he had secured but went to another venue.

A canceled Justin Bieber date, just 10 days before the play date, was a major headache. "We had it budgeted; we hate to disappoint fans; and it's not a good look for any venue when an artist cancels," said Goldman, clearly still annoyed by Bieber's bailout. "The building was tied up for a week and got nothing."

Attesting to Goldman's twin skills of communication and relationship building, GM Patrick Talty said, "Jerry's contacts in the industry are extensive which allows him to

Goldman does it "all with a great sense of humor and isn't afraid to laugh at himself or allow the team to joke with him." Goldman's colleagues still rib him about the time he was called 'Jerry Johnson' in a local news story. "As a prank, someone gave him a Coke with 'Johnson' on it— Jerry took it and placed it on his trophy wall. "That's the kind of great personality that has allowed him to build all the relationships that make him successful."

Goldman's been with SMG for 15 years; previously he was the GM of Nassau Coliseum, Uniondale, N.Y. He's married to social worker Heather and has three kids.

"I do want to acknowledge John Drum, the other AGM at the venue, who is in charge of operations. "I make the money and he spends it," added Goldman, showing off his wit and wisdom. "We're a team here."



Hall *of* HEADLINES AWARD

2017

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MARKETING



MAUREEN GINTY,
Executive VP Marketing Services &
Human Resources

CONCESSIONS



SANDRA DUNN, GM,
DCU Center, Worcester, MA

OPERATIONS



KERRY PAINTER, AGM
Cox Business Center, Tulsa OK

CONCESSIONS



ALBERT FERA,
Dir. of Food & Beverage for SAVOR,
DCU Center, Worcester, MA

BOOKINGS



JERRY GOLDMAN, AGM,
U.S. Bank Stadium, Minneapolis, MN



HALL OF HEADLINES 2017

OPERATIONS



‘Outrageously Excellent’ Operation

2017 was ‘a year of success’ for Kerry Painter in Tulsa

by NOELLE RILEY

She inspires her team, challenges co-workers to think outside the box and has a true passion for running a convention center. Her name is Kerry Painter and she’s been in charge of the Cox Business Center in Tulsa, Okla., for SMG for the last four years.

This year, the 2015 *Venues Today* Woman of Influence won the *Venues Today* Hall of Headlines Award for Operations for spearheading the massive remodeling and rebranding of the venue.

“Kerry stretches her staff to think differently and do things not necessarily in a traditional way. She doesn’t just run the building, she’s constantly striving for us to improve ourselves... to make everyone successful,” said Kathy Tinker, director of sales and marketing of Cox Business Center, a 310,625-sq.-ft. facility in downtown Tulsa.

The center has 120,000 square feet of exhibition halls, a 9,000-seat arena, roughly 20,000 square feet of conference halls and 11,000 square feet of meeting space.

The remodel included revamping the exhibit space where the exhibit hall floors were diamond ground and new lighting and fresh paint helped spruce up the area.

Cox Business Center is 51 years old. The 30,000-sq.-ft. ballroom was added in 2010. In the last year, other areas of the center were revamped, including painting the entire convention end of the building, putting wraps on



the walls, updating the lobby with fresh paint and buying new furniture.

"We really activated the lobbies and the public space," Painter said.

They also rebranded the convention center with a new value statement that says "Outrageously Excellent."

"We brought in a facilitator, and we identified ourselves and we created mission lines. We identified a value statement," Painter said. "It's on things, and we say it a lot."

They put "Outrageously Excellent" on uniforms, lanyards and the lobby wall.

"It's really hard to be lame when you're wearing something that says 'outrageously excellent,'" Painter said with enthusiasm. "If you're coming up to meet with us about a contract, it's smack in your face about what we're going to do."

It wasn't Painter or top management that came up with the logo. It was the entire team, which is the way things happen around the convention center. Painter is a collaborator, not a dictator, and she likes to involve her team on big decisions.

Outside thinking and collaboration will be key next summer when Painter, her team and SMG prepare for a \$55 million renovation of the arena attached to the convention center.

The plan is to blow out the inside of the 9,000-seat arena while keeping the shell of the structure intact. The space will become an extra 45,000 square feet of exhibition space.

Also included in the renovation is a three-story, glass-fronted atrium at the front of the convention center. "The building has no great primary entrance," Painter said, adding that it confuses guests on where to enter the building.

Those renovations start in July with a projected completion in 2020. Funds for the construction come from a Vision Tax approved by voters, Painter said.

Painter's spirit and management style hasn't gone unnoticed by SMG or her supervisor, Jeff Nickler, who is the GM of the SMG properties in Tulsa.

"She is the face of Cox Business Center)," Nickler said. "She's really over every day-to-day function of that staff. She spearheads all facets of that building."

He applauds Painter's "forward thinking" and "passion" for the industry.

"Kerry is somebody who embraces change. She wholeheartedly believes that just because we've done something one way doesn't mean that's the way it needs to be done, which is rare in the industry. She's always challenging our staff to find new ways to do better customer service, which is really cool," Nickler said.

For example, each year the convention center hosts a holiday party for its clients, and the event traditionally is held in the ballroom "because it's the newest room we have," Tinker said.

This year, Painter suggested moving the party, themed Champagne and Steel, to the

exhibit hall to show off the newly renovated space.

"Most of our clients haven't been in the exhibit hall," Tinker noted. "We like to keep their interest piqued by not always making it same old, same old."

Working with Painter on a day-to-day basis is always a learning experience, Tinker said.

"She sends us articles for potential business and professional development. There are tons of marketing ideas, a lot of time there are things we don't even think we can do. She gets us thinking about how can we translate that into our market and our clientele," Tinker said, adding that Painter is a "huge proponent of education."

Painter teaches various industry classes throughout the year, including the IAVM's Venue Management School. "I love to teach people; I get to do that quite a bit," Painter said.

A typical day at the office for Painter includes finding ways to bring clientele to a convention center located in Tulsa. "What I learned when I moved here is that Tulsa didn't have a bad reputation, but it had no reputation," Painter said, highlighting how challenging it was to bring big national or international conferences to the city.

Attracting new business comes down to getting them to Tulsa for the first visit, when they're invariably "shocked" at what a cool city Tulsa is, Painter said.

A NEW ERA... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 72

Add in 32 courtside lounges tucked behind the seating that don't offer a view of the court but feature a double-height space with LED wall screen and shared wine cellar and the courtside amenities offer variety.

The sidelines include typical club seats amid the 18,000-seat venue. The horseshoe of 44 suites was designed for optimized sightlines for the court and end-stage concerts. Just above the suites, 60 theater boxes look just like traditional theater boxes with actual furniture seating, a dedicated dining table and a large lounge.

The viewing options don't stop with the upper deck, as bridge viewing and standing room areas hover above the floor and a skybar lounge includes views to the court. At the very top of the building, without views to the court, but with views over the bay, onto the


Bay Bridge and of the city skyline, is a restaurant, accessed from outside the venue and secure from the ticketed areas for use on any day.

The variety in seating options was driven by, Manica says, ownership wanting to provide a variety of viewing options. "Of course, San Francisco is an amazing market and we had the support (to offer) a variety of seating types," he says.

Manica also brings together a unique way for Chase Center to treat house reduction. He designed the arena to scale into a 5,000-seat performance hall. By turning a secondary arena entrance into the main theater entrance, visitors come into a half-house situation, but not split horizontally, rather split vertically. Using drop-down panels complete with lighting, one side of the building turns into a theater with viewing angles that work for theater

and additional lighting grids and rigging for spotlights. "We worked with a theater expert to understand how the sidewalls can drop down and create a sense of theater," Manica says. The built-in-place stage creates a completely different experience within Chase Center.

Outside, as the Chase Center connects to the training facility, mixed-use and public areas, the main entrance also serves as a community plaza, designed as a front porch for the city to stage events reminiscent of Rockefeller Square in New York City.

From the front porch at San Francisco's Chase Center to the seven-story atrium that opens up a fresh arena perspective in Milwaukee, the next two years will feature the opening of two new NBA arenas, offering new benchmarks in their respective communities and also the arena world. 



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For more information on the 2018 Seminar, please visit www.StadiumManagers.org.





HALL OF HEADLINES 2017

BRANDING + SPONSORSHIPS



Gift of Kindness Resonates with All

SMG's Maureen Ginty rolled out an inclusive, attainable recognition campaign that soared

by LINDA DECKARD

It's important to recognize holistic, universally possible acts of kindness and to include the personal life as well as professional career in the mix when rolling out a program like SMG's Gift of Kindness Campaign.

Maureen Ginty, SMG EVP, who rolled out the employee recognition program in honor of SMG's 40th Anniversary, is personally inspired by the program and humbled that others thought so well of it that she won the 2017 *Venues Today* Hall of Headlines Award for Marketing.

So far, SMG has recognized three winners, one each quarter of this year, with plans to recognize the fourth early next year and the grand champion soon after. Employees who are nominated for a specific act of kindness in either their personal or work life get a check for \$250, a Gift of Kindness Waterford ornament and recognition from their peers, bosses and clients at work.

They come from all over the country (SMG manages more than 200 venues) and each winner, in fact each nominee, leaves a lasting impression on Ginty and the SMG World.

"We've had great winners so far," Ginty said. "That wonderful guy who trains those dogs. That group that went to Houston on their own time and the guy who was just kind and helped a woman.

"They don't have to do outrageous things. They just have to demonstrate what the company believes in. That's the whole thing with



k'nekt (the human resources customer service program she started at SMG). It's supposed to be part of your personal life and your work life. That's, frankly, why it has resonated so well with our employees. You think about this at home or on a date; it's not just in your work life."

The 2017 winners of the Gift of Kindness Campaign so far include:

1ST QUARTER WINNER

Randy Hollenshead, Stationary Engineer, Moscone Center, San Francisco

Randy and his wife, Chris, have been volunteers with Guide Dogs for the Blind for 17 years as club leaders, puppy raisers and breeder custodians. They teach other trainers new techniques, raise and train puppies for 14-18 months before their formal training and the dogs' graduation to being trained with their new client/owners. Randy's tireless work helps to nurture puppies into intelligent, caring service animals which, in turn, provide new, fuller lives to the blind.

2ND QUARTER WINNER

Adam Pawlowski, Operator, Meridian Centre, St. Catherine, Ontario

An SMG employee at the Meridian Centre witnessed an out-of-the-ordinary act of kindness from Operator Adam Pawlowski, which helped diffuse a difficult situation. Adam offered to assist an elderly patron whose husband had become irate at a difficult parking

situation. His wife was unable to walk the distance from the parking lot and he wasn't able to park any closer. Adam stepped in, offered to personally escort the woman inside. He carried her purse, held her arm, and kept her company until her husband returned. This kindness was such that his coworker felt compelled to submit his name to the Gift of Kindness contest.

3RD QUARTER WINNERS

Willie Williams, Director of Operations; Kevin Murphy, Event Manager; Mike Moore, Assistant Box Office Manager; Andrea Collins, Staff Accountant; Kathy Tinker, Director of Convention Sales & Marketing, all with Cox Business Center, Tulsa, Okla.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, which devastated the Houston region, the SMG-managed NRG Center was designated an Emergency Shelter for evacuees of Harris County, and a call for volunteers went out. These five men and women from Tulsa's Cox Business Center answered that call, loading themselves into one car and driving from Tulsa to the NRG Center in Houston to help in whatever way they could. They gave up their Labor Day weekend and some stayed through the following week right up to the Texans game on Sept. 10. Their valuable and skilled service included forklift operator, dock marshal, command center and media relations. Willie Williams, in particular, made sure to take good care of his team, giving them

daily rides home in addition to his exhausting work sometimes putting in hours from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Ginty recalls first hearing about Waterford's Gift of Kindness, part of its Greatest Gifts campaign, last New Year's Eve. She marched into the board room, knowing they were thinking 'what now?' and offered it up to affirmation all around. It was important to make it holistic, life affirming and not just about the money.

The service dog trainer gave his winnings to charity. "What a nice guy," Ginty said. Relatives could submit SMG employee names for something kind they did at home. "We want families to understand these things are part of our company, too."

"You can't just put on a face. I think that's what makes adult learners engage. They have to see relevance in their personal and professional life. It can't be all about work."

The Gift of Kindness Campaign follows last year's Wow! campaign, similar in nature, and will be followed next year by yet another iteration. Ginty believes in this kind of recognition. Doug Thornton, SMG SVP, New Orleans couldn't agree more. "The concept was immediately embraced by our SMG staff, many of whom perform acts of kindness every day in their communities and facilities. This was a great way to recognize their efforts with a company-wide initiative that also parallels our customer service values."



HALL OF HEADLINES 2017

CONCESSIONS



Branded Batch Cocktails Light It Up

DCU Center and SMG offer more fun for fans with new initiative

by JEFFREY STEELE

When the SMG General Managers Conference was convened in Long Beach last summer, the Branded Batch Cocktail Program from Savor DCU Center/SMG, Worcester, Mass., was one of three award finalists. Albert Fera, Savor's director of food and beverage, and Sandra Dunn, venue general manager, knew just how to grab the judges' undivided attention.

It being SMG's 40th, or Ruby Anniversary, the DCU Center/SMG team rolled out a branded batch of ruby-colored cocktails it called "Wicked Red," and donned Wicked Red T-shirts to trumpet the drink. "New England's Premier Arena & Convention Complex" went on to capture top prize. Before long, other SMG buildings were emulating the initiative. Now, the program has nabbed the ultimate triumph: The 2017 Hall of Headlines Award for Concessions bestowed by *Venues Today*.

The Branded Batch Cocktail program features event-themed craft cocktails pre-made in jugs and served from mobile stands that reduce concession congestion. Each drink is branded to DCU Center events, with creative names and bright colors illuminated by blinking LED lights.

Savor estimates each Branded Batch Cocktail selling for \$12 costs \$2.26 to make, for an 18.3 percent cost factor. The cocktails are available at five to 12 portable locations, depending on the size of the event. Because the



drinks are pre-made, union “beertenders” not typically allowed to sell cocktails are able to do so. The Branded Batch Cocktail Program has resulted in the top six gross sales per cap records for arena concessions. These include Pearl Jam (\$11.19 and \$10.55), Phish (\$11.02 and \$10.82), Dead & Company (\$12.43), Garth Brooks (\$13.14, \$13.71 and \$10.48), Megadeth (\$13.50) and I Love the 90s Tour (\$15.76).

How did the idea come about? “First, we were looking for ways to increase speed of service, something all buildings want to do,” Fera says. After all, he adds, when patrons visit a concession stand for a mixed drink, the concoction has to be prepared, which takes time.

“Second, we were looking for something that stood out. There are only so many ways to serve a hot dog. There are only so many ways to pour a beer.”

Fera recalled visiting Disney World a couple years before, and seeing huge illuminated blinking frosted cups festooned with enormous straws. “I noticed that people wanted it, without even knowing what it was. I brainstormed and brought it to Sandy. The benefit of working in this building, and working with Sandy Dunn, is she embraces new ideas. She’s always looking for the next cool thing we can do; she doesn’t want to stay with the norm. I came to her and said, ‘I want to try this,’ and she was on-board with it. She loved it.”

Because the cocktails are batched in bulk in five-gallon water jugs and served from large drink dispensers on portables throughout the

concourse, drink service is expedited.

“The only thing that has to be put on the stands are the cups, and they have the LED light on them already,” Fera said.

The real genius, though, is the branding of the drinks. The drink “brand” and color is geared to the event taking place in the center. Is the event a Worcester Railers East Coast Hockey League game? Fans throughout the arena sport a bright blue drink called “The Blue Line.”

Is the event a Ringo Starr concert? The cocktail, naturally, is a deep purple beverage called The Octopus’s Garden.

“People see it and without knowing what it is, they want it,” Fera says. “In the majority of our shows, the arena is darkened. The LED lights stand out, announcing the presence of the drinks. Looking across the arena, it looks like a bunch of fireflies.”

While the Branded Batch Cocktail Program was a great idea, actually implementing the concept wasn’t without its challenges. “After I proposed it, we created a mockup,” Fera said. “I worked with my bar manager and we made a bright blue electric drink. Liquor distributors had given us a light to put on the bottom of bottles, helping bottles stand out on the bar.

“And I was just playing with this, because I knew it would look good on the bottom of the cup. It worked perfectly, but I had to find more of the lights. The distributor only had 50 of them.”

Fera wanted not only lights on cup bottoms, but blinking lights. After some searching, he was able to work with one of his pur-

veyors who handles printing for the arena, who was able to point him to a supplier in Hong Kong able to make the LED coasters available in bulk.

Social media proved to be the ideal promotional tool for the cocktails. Dunn soon had the building’s marketing department promoting the drinks during the shows via social media.

“If [concert-goers] are at a concert, they’re on their phones, on Facebook and on Twitter,” Fera said. “When shows start, we put a post on our Instagram account, and on our Twitter feed, promoting the cocktails. People see it on their phones and go out searching for them.”

For her part, Dunn believes the program is just one more element enhancing customer enjoyment. “Whether it’s the naming of the cocktails, the coloring of the cocktails, the lighting of the cocktails, that all touches people’s senses,” she says.

In addition to promoting the drinks at each event, DCU Center uses advance mailers to promote shows, announcing the drink for that event and where to find it on the concourse.

To date it’s been Fera’s responsibility and privilege to come up with the names for the drinks. But, Dunn says, they may consider staging contests that will be promoted through social media.

The bottom line is that many of the shows at DCU Center are fairly pricey Fera said, adding this is “something that lets people have a little more fun. The more fun you can make it, the more they want to come back again.”

REBRANDING... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 89

the shooting, many at risk to their own safety.

Las Vegas hotels and casinos joined the efforts and started flashing the message: “We’ve been there for you during the good times. Thank you for being there for us now.”

Subsequent ads included a New York City billboard that read “What Happens Here Will Not Stop Us,” and the “Strength In Unity” campaign, a series of messages with user-generated content attached such as “No one and nothing will stop me from going to Vegas” and “We are stronger together.”

“Using real people’s own words was a powerful way to express that Vegas would not be defeated,” said Tull.

The latest message is a new series of ads that feature entertainers and chefs letting people know that Vegas is safe and still a great place to visit.

MGM Resorts International, owner of Mandalay Bay Resort, the hotel the shooter positioned himself in to carry out the massacre, also jettisoned their two-week-old campaign, “Welcome to the Show,” which took its ad agency McGann New York 18 months to put together.

“We had to scramble to get it all down but taking that message down was what the situation called for,” MGM’s Chief Experience and Marketing Officer Lili Tomovich told The National Association of Advertisers last month.

All of LVCVB and MGM’s rebranding efforts have seen results: tourism in October was down only four percent and by November it was back to normal levels. “We didn’t have any business cancellations,” said Tull. “In October, anecdotally, we heard that people wanted to be respectful and put off coming in the weeks following the incident; it was not a case of the tourists feeling unsafe but, instead, wanting to let us heal.”

The city of Orlando, Fla., faced a similar situation after the Pulse nightclub killings in 2016 followed quickly by an incident at Disney World where a boy was dragged into a lake and killed by an alligator.

The business-targeted campaign running at the time was “You don’t know the half of it.” Post Pulse, the city wanted to show off its diversity and how the whole city stood strong behind the LGBT community, a population the majority of Pulse victims identified them-

selves as being part of.

“The whole city came together, embraced the LGBT community, and stood up for tolerance and acceptance for all our residents,” said Heather Fagin, deputy chief of staff, City of Orlando. “We wanted messaging that expressed that.”

“Orlando United” was unanimously agreed upon as the new message during the few first days the Emergency Family Assistance Center was set up in Camping World Stadium. “We needed to have a positive message for people to rally behind,” said Michele Brennan, director of communications, city of Orlando.

The “Orlando United” message was paired with a new graphic for Orlando’s fountain image, redrawn by an artist using the colors of the gay pride rainbow flag, and the slogan has been used in many ways ever since.

Fagin believes that a quickly put together press conference by the mayor, where he expressed that Orlando is safe and accessible to everyone, combined with the quickly put out positive messaging, “is the main reason that tourism did not decline following the incidents.”



Congratulations 2017 Hall of Headlines award winners!

NEWS

Peter Luukko and Tim Leweske, co-chairs, Arena Alliance, Oak View Group, Los Angeles
Chris Verros, CEO, Centerplate

BOOKINGS

Jerry Goldman, AGM/SMG, U.S. Bank Stadium, Minneapolis

MARKETING

Maureen Ginty, Exec. VP – Marketing Services & Human Resources, SMG, West Conshohocken, Pa.

OPERATIONS

Kerry Painter, AGM, Cox Business Center, Tulsa Okla.

CONCESSIONS

Sandra Dunn, GM, & Albert Fera, Dir. of Food & Beverage for Savor, DCU Center/SMG, Worcester, Mass.

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