



Ariana Grande, shown during a 2017 concert, is among the many performers who are part of Honda Center's history.

BY BRAD WEISSBERG

THE MIGHTY HONDA CENTER

NO ONE THOUGHT THE O.C. NEEDED A SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT
VENUE UNTIL THE ARENA, NOW 25, PROVED IT DID

SPOTLIGHT

THE STORIES OF Honda Center and the Anaheim Ducks are so intertwined that now, 25 years later, it's impossible to discuss one without the other.

But at the beginning, Honda Center, formerly Arrowhead Pond, was going to open without a sports tenant, a rarity for a large arena.

Tim Ryan, Honda Center CEO and chief operating officer of the Anaheim Ducks, came on board to be the assistant general manager of the new facility from an SMG building also in the Los Angeles area, Long Beach Convention Center, about a year before Arrowhead Pond opened. The general manager was Brad Mayne, now IAVM president and CEO.

"The origin of the facility was a deal that

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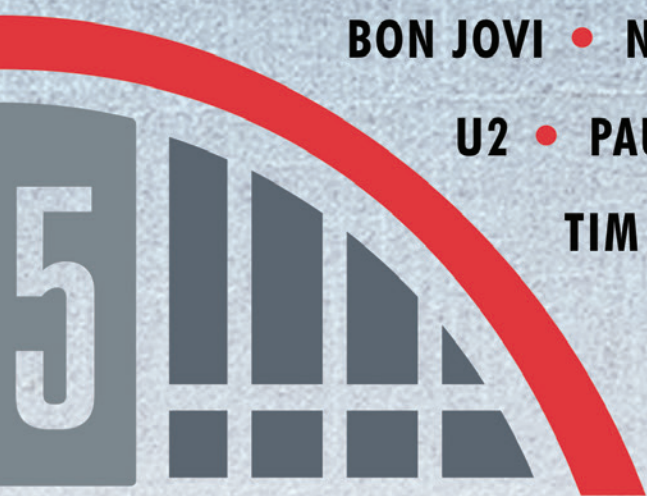
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credible years! Here's to the next 25!

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was struck between the city of Anaheim and Ogden (Entertainment, later acquired by Aramark), who financed the building to create a unique venue in Orange County using a public/private partnership model,” Ryan said. “At the time Ogden was a huge international company with close to a hundred facilities under contract to manage.”

The cost of the construction was \$123 million. “To build this arena today with 250,000 square feet of Italian marble would exceed \$500 million,” Ryan estimated.

To the rescue of the tenantless building came The Walt Disney Co., which had a vested interest in the region via its iconic Disneyland theme park, also in Anaheim.

On Oct. 2, 1992, Walt Disney Pictures released “The Mighty Ducks.” Starring Emilio Estevez and a band of misfit kids who learn to play hockey and win as a team, the film was a hit, grossing \$51 million at the box office.

“Mighty Ducks” spinoffs such as cartoons and merchandise “took off like wildfire,” Ryan said. “Disney decided that they wanted to put an NHL expansion team in the venue and name the team The Mighty Ducks.”

The Walt Disney Co. did what it does best, marketing the team and the new arena and creating synergy between all its properties. The team had sellout after sellout right out of the gate, Ryan recalled. “To say it was a resounding success would truly be an understatement,” he said.

“The market was ripe for a venue like this.”

In 1993 the entertainment business looked at Orange County as a suburb of Los Angeles. “Back then, concert promoters had a hard time understanding that while L.A. is only about 22 miles away, we measure driving distance in Southern California in time, not miles,” explained Ryan. “So here we had a market the size of Chicago, 3 million people, with a tremendous amount of discretionary income, that was being overlooked, underserved and virtually ignored.”

Because traffic was only getting worse every year, Ryan is convinced that building the Honda Center was a stroke of genius. “It could take you two hours to get from here to downtown L.A. some days,” he said.

The arena partnered with Nederlander Concerts for content. “From a booking standpoint, our corporate office at Ogden knew it had to do something significant and substantial to prove this market and the building were going to be a great destination,” he said.

That opportunity came when Barbra Streisand came out of a 30-year hiatus from performing concerts in 1994 and Honda Center booked her for the last stop of the tour.

“The pent-up demand to see Streisand cannot be underestimated,” Ryan said. “I showed up at the building at 5 a.m. and there were 7,000 people waiting in line to buy tickets. The first concert sold out in minutes. We asked Barbra’s manager, Marty Erlichman, if we should do another. He said yes, and that one sold out in minutes, too. It took 10 hours, with the fans agreeing to only buy two tickets for each show. We wound up doing six sold-out shows.”

It was the turning point for Honda Center. “The industry took notice and realized we were a real building and a real market,” said Ryan. “Once we went on sale with other events and kept selling out, the market started to speak for itself.”

Honda Center was averaging 40 concerts a year through the 1990s and hosted a virtual who’s who of touring superstars. “We had Paul McCartney, the Rolling Stones, the Eagles, Bruce Springsteen, AC/DC, U2 and so many others,” he recalled.

Kevin Starkey, vice president and chief operations officer, has been with Honda Center since the building opened in 1993. “Along with the great bands that have come

Pink inspired the Raise Your Glass cocktail when she played Honda Center.

SPOTLIGHT





Being on the ice and watching the Ducks win their first Stanley Cup in 2007 is the highlight over 25 years at Honda Center for GM Tim Ryan and VP of Ops Kevin Starkey.

through the arena, we've also had gymnastics championships here, UFC events, PBR and the circus," he said. "We now do over 125 events a year."

The Korean boy band BTS holds the record for the arena's fastest sellout. They played two sold-out shows during their 2017 tour, Starkey said.

Mexican musician Marco Antonio Solis has played the arena a record nine times, the most for a solo artist. The Eagles hold the record for the most performances by a group. Tying with them eight performances each are Alan Jackson, Bon Jovi, Andrea Bocelli and Elton John.

In 1998, Honda Center branched out from concerts and Ducks games and played host to the NCAA men's basketball West Regional, its first taste of March Madness. "It was a huge deal to get that booking," Ryan said. "In 2019 we will host our eighth NCAA event."

"As I look back on the '90s at Honda Center, we were averaging 190 events a year, we had long ago proved we were a solid, steady building, and then a new high point came when we hosted the L.A. Clippers," Ryan said.

The NBA's Clippers arrived following the devastating Los Angeles earthquake in 1994. "The L.A. Sports Arena was damaged to such an extent that the Clippers couldn't play there," said Ryan. "I got on the phone with Clippers President Andy Roeser and he decided to move the Clippers' game against the New York Knicks to Honda Center. We still laugh about it today, but we both don't know how many people were in this building for that game. It certainly seemed like more than the 18,400 people that the

manifest says we can hold."

That led to people seriously looking at The O.C. as an NBA market. The arena wound up hosting dozens of Clippers games, Ryan said.

In 1998, Brad Mayne left to become general manager of American Airlines Center in Dallas, and Ryan became the Honda Center GM.

In the early 2000s, Ogden Corp. sold its concessions and facility management divisions. "There were two major facilities they still had an interest in: Ottawa (Ontario, now Canadian Tire Centre) and Anaheim," said Ryan. "The building is owned by the city of Anaheim, but for two years we went through a process of trying to find a buyer for the management contract."

All the traditional management companies came in and made bids, but the ultimate winner was a local company owned by Henry and Susan Samueli.

"The Samuelis, the co-owners of Broadcom, along with Michael Schulman, their management director, took over in December of 2003," said Ryan. "They paid close attention to the Ducks action, and when we made our run for the Stanley Cup in 2003, the Samuelis decided they loved the sport."

In 2005, The Walt Disney Co. made the decision to sell The Mighty Ducks. The Samuelis wasted no time in swooping in to purchase the team.

"There was an NHL lockout at the time. There was no certainty as to when the season would start, and Henry still took

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HONDA CENTER

BY THE NUMBERS

CAPACITY

18,900

COST TO BUILD

\$123
MILLIONLARGEST CONCERT
CROWD18,739
FOR GEORGE STRAIT,
APRIL 29, 1994

VISITORS EACH YEAR

1.5
MILLIONEVENTS
EACH YEAR

160

SQUARE
FOOTAGE

650,000

MORE THAN

200,000

SQUARE FEET OF MARBLE LINING THE
INTERIOR CONCOURSE

UFC EVENTS

7

EMPLOYEES WHO
HAVE BEEN WITH THE
VENUE SINCE 1993

26

PALM TREES
ON THE PROPERTY

MORE THAN 130



Honda Center
opened 25 years
ago as Arrow-
head Pond.

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the risk," Ryan said. "They decided to drop 'The Mighty' and the team officially became the Anaheim Ducks."

The rest is history. The Anaheim Ducks won the Stanley Cup in 2007 against the Ottawa Senators, clinching the championship in Game 5 at Honda Center.

"The Samuelis are great owners. They care about the community and always put the fans first," said Ryan, who has seen major changes — and major investment — in Honda Center following their arrival.

"Henry and Susan are incredible owners to work for," echoed Starkey. "They've always got the city and giving back to the community forefront in their minds. Having local ownership has been fantastic. They keep investing back into the building and the arena looks like it's 7 to 8 years old — not 25."

The venue has 125 full-time employees and 1,800-2,000 part-time employees on any given event night, he said. "We were very fortunate. Most of the staff stayed on following the management change," Starkey said.

"They've put over \$75 million into the building since they bought the contract," said Ryan. "And they plan to put tens of millions more into the venue in the next five to 10 years. The Samuelis believe in investing into the building every year, not waiting for something to break or become obsolete before fixing."

There's been new seating; new lighting; new scoreboards; the addition of the 30,000-square-foot Shock Top Terrace, which holds 1,300 people, and the Jack Daniels Club; the complete remodeling last year of the arena's South Entry, which added thousands of square feet; a new team store; and a new food court concept.

"As we expand the building it allows us to stay state-of-the-art," Ryan said.

Food has always been at the forefront of the Honda Center operation. Jo-Jo Doyle has been the executive chef at the venue since 2013, when the venue switched from Aramark, which had been the concessionaire for 20 years, and took its F&B operation in-house. He came from Churchill Downs in Louisville, Ky.

"We made the move for greater flexibility, higher-quality food, to have better menu options and a better customer experience," Doyle said. "It was all Tim Ryan's brainchild, to take everything in-house from security and parking to food."

"The Samuelis made a 100 percent commitment to do whatever it took to make the best F&B program," he said. "We rebuilt everything

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IMAGINE DRAGONS @ HONDA CENTER – NOV 16, 2017

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TIM, JOANN, KEVIN, JOEL, GABE, MARK, AND THE REST OF THE STAFF
HAVE MUCH TO BE PROUD OF, AND EVEN MORE TO
LOOK FORWARD TO IN THE FUTURE.





On Nov. 19, 2017, Corey Perry, Teemu Selanne, Henry Samueli, Susan Samueli and Paul Kariya celebrated Selanne and Kariya's induction into the Hockey Hall of Fame.

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from the ground up.”

Doyle inherited an operation badly in need of a makeover. “We had a shell, of which many of the pieces were no good,” he said. “We took what was consistent yet bland and broke the mold.”

Doyle and his team, which now stands at 700, including chefs, cooks, prep staff, waiters and part-time concessionaires, built a fully operating kitchen with a grill, a wood-burning stove and two fryers on the 400 level “where the true fans were”; added menu items like one-pound meatballs, chicken fried rice, tuna tataki and homemade corn dogs.

They opened up a gastro pub concept called The Kitchen where fans can get burgers, loaded fries, pizza and pastrami sandwiches. Doyle created “a vast suite menu” where he adds a package every month such as an Oktoberfest menu and themed holiday menus.

Also added were local vendors like Wahoo Fish Tacos and Pick Up Stix and a Southern California concept that serves “Southern food with a Cali twist like fried shrimp po’ boy burrito, blackened catfish and Bananas Foster parfaits.

“We’re very cognizant of our O.C. customers,” he said. “We’ve added Anaheim chili for

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Congrats, Honda Center

*Here's to 25 years together
and many more to come!*

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TO BE PART OF THE PAST

HONORED
TO BE PART OF THE FUTURE



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As a longtime member of **ArenaNetwork**, we are extremely proud to have worked with **Tim Ryan** and the **Honda Center** staff for almost twenty years, and we look forward to many more!

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them, and all our produce comes from local vendor Melissa's Produce."

Specialty drinks are created for the artists that play the building. The Breezy was served for Kendrick Lamar shows, Tennessee Fire for Sugarland, and Raise Your Glass for Pink.

"We doubled our revenue the first year we took over and per caps are now at \$18-\$20 and continue to grow," said Doyle proudly. We run it like a family business should run it."

"I worked my whole career for this job," added Doyle. "I love this place."

Ryan's best memory of Honda Center was "being on the ice as the clock ran down during the final game of the Stanley Cup in 2007," and his worst day was actually spent away from the venue. "I was flying home from a conference in Miami the day of 9/11, the plane was grounded in Dallas, and I was stuck there for five days. Being separated from everyone at Honda Center was difficult."

Winning the 2007 Stanley Cup was also the highlight of Starkey's 25 years at Honda Center. "It was unbelievable," he said.

Starkey recalled when the power went out in 1997. "It was during a hockey game," he said. "A rat walked down a conduit and got into our electrical room and shorted out the electrical systems. The entire building went completely dark. Secondary power came on fairly quickly, but it was the longest few minutes I've ever spent in the building."

Starkey also recalled the 1994 earthquake. "I started out as the conversion supervisor and I was in the building, on the floor, at the time it was about 4 a.m. and it was pretty scary. The whole building was moving." Luckily for Honda Center, there was only minor damage to some signs.

Starkey has seen a lot of technological changes to the venue, including heightened security using magnetometers, closed-circuit cameras, Wi-Fi, the addition of 250 POS stations, live streaming and in-seat ordering.

"It's a safe building to come to, welcoming, and we keep it current both aesthetically and technology-wise," he said.

The future of Honda Center will include "looking at esports, and sports betting is certainly at the forefront of topics that the NHL team owners are talking about," Ryan said.

"This is a place that has made fantastic memories for so many of our guests," said Starkey. "We've heard so many stories of first-date nights, anniversary nights, and it's a place where families can take their kids and feel comfortable going to."

"If you've had a bad day, you can come here and take in a rousing night of hockey or a great concert," he added. "It's like my second home." ■

SPOTLIGHT