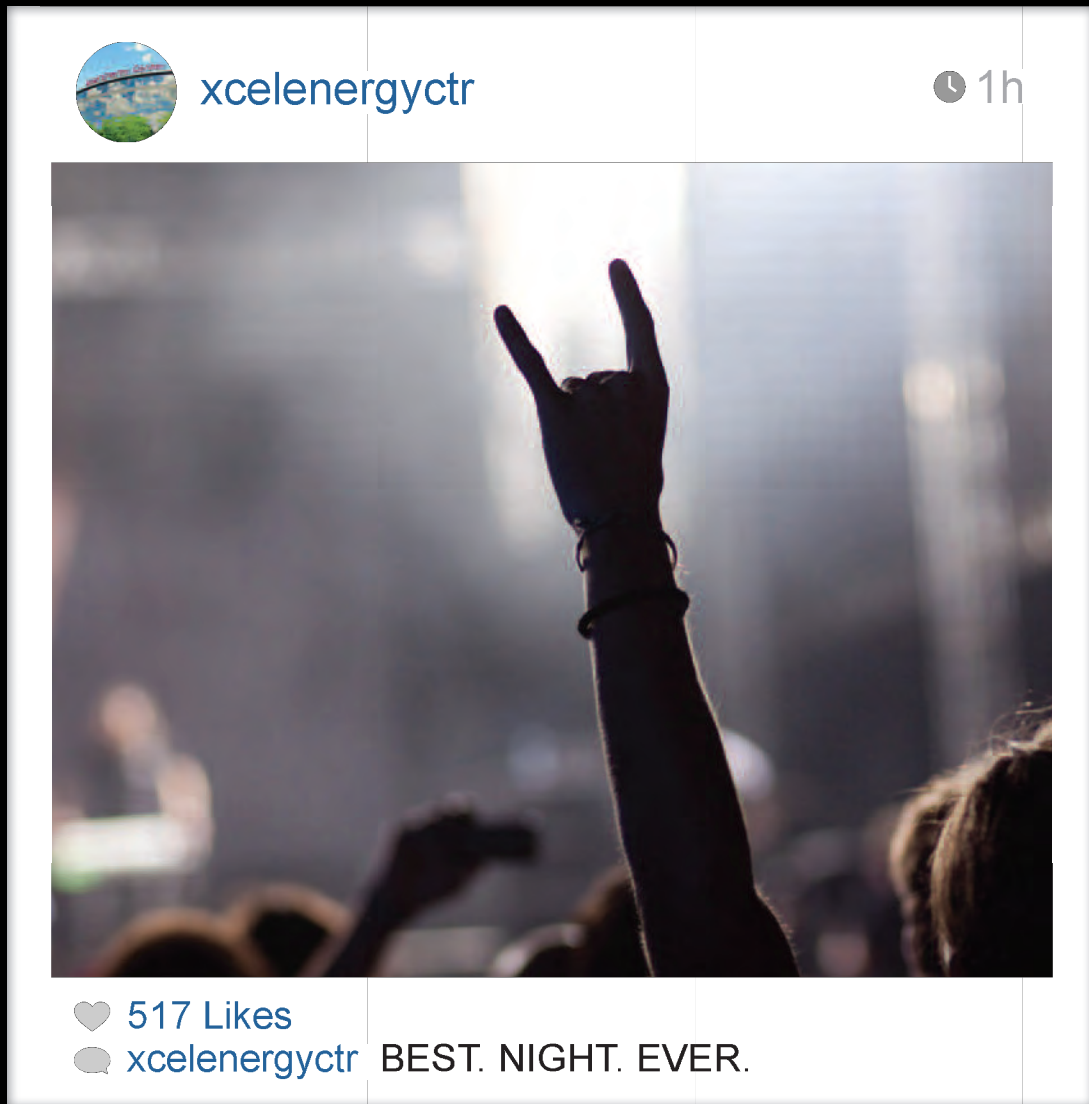


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(Clockwise from top left) Xcel Energy Center at night; fans are Number 1; Minnesota Wild hockey action.



One of the best compliments that can be paid to a venue is that years down the road it still has the look, feel and appeal it oozed when it opened. As Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul, Minn., celebrates its 15th birthday this year, it is one such facility that defies the years and has the same aura of newness and freshness it did in 2000 when the doors first opened.

“Believe it or not, people still call this the new building in town,” said venue veteran Jack Larson, who joined Xcel Energy Center as vice president/general manager the year after it opened after having worked at the Target Center in Minneapolis. “It still has a new-building feel to it, and the ownership group has committed to keeping the building first-class, clean and maintained.” **PAGE 60 >**



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XCEL ENERGY CENTER BY THE NUMBERS

Capacity: 18,568

Owner: City of Saint Paul

Operator: Saint Paul Arena Company (SPAC), an affiliate of Minnesota Sports & Entertainment (MSE)
Architectural Firm: HOK Sports Facilities Group

Food & Beverage: Levy Restaurants

Construction Cost: \$170 million

Opened: September 2000

Home Tenant: National Hockey League Minnesota Wild

First Event: Minnesota Wild vs. Mighty Ducks of Anaheim, NHL preseason, Sept. 29, 2000

Largest Concert Crowd: 20,554 for Shania Twain, Oct. 28, 2003

Most Sellouts By An Artist: 3, by Minnesota native Prince, June 16-18, 2004

Percentage of staff who commute by bus, bike, carpool or an efficient vehicle: 40

Percentage of all waste recycled: 60
Gallons of water saved per year by changing out just one device on restroom faucets: 78,000

Percentage of cleaning products that meet green standards: 90

Visitors each year: 1.7 million

Number of sporting and entertainment events each year: More than 150

Size: 650,000 square feet with four separate concourses and four seating levels plus a press level. Able to accommodate more than 20,000 guests.

XCEL ENERGY CENTER IS 15 YEARS YOUNG

Making the fan number one and the design timeless have served the St. Paul arena well

by R.V. BAUGUS

The 15-year-old, 17,954-seat Xcel Energy Center, which looks and operates like a new arena even today, is owned by the city of St. Paul and operated by Minnesota Sports & Entertainment. Anchor tenant is the Minnesota Wild of the National Hockey League.

In fact, it was the city's desire to have an NHL franchise that set the wheels in motion for the \$165-million construction to even take place. The Minnesota North Stars began playing in the NHL in 1967 but relocated to Dallas in the fall of 1993. Since Minnesota without hockey is like a pancake without syrup, little time was wasted in building a facility that would one day bring professional hockey back to the Land of 10,000 Lakes. When the doors opened on Sept. 29, 2000, for the Wild's first preseason game, that day had arrived.

"To build this building at the price it was built ... it's unheard of," said Jim Ibister, vice president of facility administration for the Minnesota Wild and general manager of St. Paul RiverCentre convention center that is part of the downtown complex that, in addition to the attached Xcel Energy Center, also includes Roy Wilkins Auditorium and Ordway Center for the

Performing Arts. "This was not a building built on the cheap. It was built with really specific things in mind. We take care of it and want to be good stewards for the building because it's a place that Minnesotans really, really care about."

Indeed, Minnesotans are a devoted fan base as evidenced by the 400 consecutive sellout crowds that attended Wild games from the venue's inception through Oct. 16, 2010. The venue hosts four major high school hockey tournaments including the state high school hockey championship, a two-day event in March with two sessions per day that attract capacity crowds and bring some 100,000 people through the venue for the four sessions. The event is televised and is one of the biggest annual events in the state. The venue will host the 2016 National Figure Skating Championships in January as well as the NCAA regional hockey tournament. It has been awarded the 2018 Frozen Four, college hockey's equivalent of basketball's Final Four. It will mark the third time Xcel Energy Center has hosted the three-game event of two semifinals and the national championship.

None of this would even be talked about had the NHL not awarded a franchise to the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 64 →



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CERTIFIABLY SUSTAINABLE

Xcel Energy Center earned its green status from the get-go

by R.V. BAUGUS

“We are very green and our sustainability efforts are near the top in the country. We promote that fact to shows and concerts coming into the arena.” — JACK LARSON

Too often sustainability is used as a buzzword or catchphrase. That is not the situation at the Xcel Energy Center, where it is lived and breathed in the life of the venue.

“We are very green and our sustainability efforts are near the top in the country,” said Jack Larson, the venue’s vice president/general manager. “We promote that fact to shows and concerts coming into the arena. Many of those want to work with us at that point to help us accomplish even more.”

The venue had always been green in the traditional sense that people think of with the likes of recycling bins stationed inside and outside the facility. But there was more that could be done, and Larson and his team knew it.

“We started about six years ago with the idea about how to become more sustainable in our operation,” said Jim Ibister, vice president of facility administration for the Minnesota Wild and general manager of the St. Paul RiverCentre. “We were recycling but we knew

we could do a lot more than that. We were not going to rush anything. We wanted to be cautious and careful about building a strong foundation from the internal side, where we changed a lot of behind-the-scenes processes.

“Most of all, we want to be transparent with our guests about sustainability. We put out reports for everybody to see so that they knew that this was something we were going to do together. A lot of it is just tapping into a Midwest mentality of not being wasteful.”

Ibister said that many fans and people in the community asked specifically what the venue was doing in the area of sustainability and even if more could be done. Just placing more containers about the property was not going to suffice.

“We were not going to jump in and throw a bunch of receptacle containers out there because there’s enough dubiousness out there about sustainability and all this stuff as it relates to waste,” Ibister said. “It ends up in a landfill anyway, they say.

“We did a lot of things with sustainability

before we even touched a guest so that when we got to the point where we were out in front of people we could show them what we were doing with our systems and our processes. We were still going to make mistakes but we weren’t going to make those big mistakes where somebody is going to be rolling by with a big dumpster and putting all the bottles and cans and trash and compost in it and rolling away. We had built a good enough foundation before we made a big public push for that. I think that became really, really critical because we then were able to go out and talk to our guests about it. We got quite a bit of positive feedback about how we can do more of that.”

In 2014 alone the campus earned certifications in Green Globes, APEX/ASTM and LEED, making it the first complex in the world to receive all three of the certifications.

Some of the steps taken include 60% of all waste is recycled, 40% of staff commute by bus, bike, carpool or an efficient vehicle and 90% of cleaning products meet green standards.

Even at that, Ibister said it is not enough

to just spew numbers to the public, but that achieving sustainability success includes engaging that same public.

"You get interactions of hey, did you do this and can you do this?" he said. "There was a lot more of that. I think Minnesota again is a place where the environment is really important. Obviously water is really important, and keeping our initiatives tied to where we think our fans are most engaged is also really important. We made sure that our background and our foundation were really strong so that when we went to the guests they believed us, we were credible and we weren't just going out to get certifications. That said, we were first in the world with three major certifications at the same time. They weren't just pieces of paper or they weren't that certificate of participation. They were really earned."

The venue has partnered with the NHL to join Change the Course, a national initiative promoting water conservation and restoration.

"Water conservation is important to us all," Ibister said. "Obviously we play on a sheet of ice and this was a particular initiative we wanted to push.

"Once again, we were very transparent with our fans and community. We talked

about our processes and put out reports for everybody to see so that they knew that this was something we were going to do together. I think it's been really successful because of that."

Ibister cites again the mindset of Minnesotans which is one of not being wasteful.

"What are you doing? Don't waste that," he said. "We hear a lot of that, whether it is about our trash or our electrical. We've seen electricity ... it's not about sustainability and not necessarily about the environment, but it's the thriftiness of it almost, right?"

Ibister said the water conservation initiative was one where the message was important, being directed to citizens from the Land of 10,000 Lakes.

"We think water is really important to us," he said. "You don't play as much hockey as we do in the state and have the nickname our state has without water being important to the area.

"One of our initiatives focuses each year on one particular initiative and pushing it a little bit publicly. We decided we'd get into a water campaign. One of the things we tied into with the NHL was a program that was helping to restore water into the Colorado River basin.

As we sat and discussed this it was important to the NHL so we wanted to help them but at the same time thought this was going to be a hard sell.

"Why would Minnesotans care about the Colorado River basin? There are a lot of reasons relating to fruit, vegetables and produce. Water conservation is important to all of us, but we knew we had to get involved at a local level."

To that end, the venue staff had an opportunity to adopt a portion of the river, making for a stronger connection and greater sense of rallying to a cause.

"It gave us a great opportunity to get connected with a local university and their environmental program and talk about storm drain protection and other things," Ibister said. "They had a program called Storm Drain Goalie that was about protecting the storm drain from fertilizers and those kinds of things. The more we connected locally the more we can connect things to fans that they care about the more credibility we have. It's a universal thing."



Interviewed for this story: **Jack Larson**, (651) 265-4869;
Jim Ibister, (651) 602-6000

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XCEL ENERGY CENTER... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 60
Minnesota Wild contingent on the venue being constructed. Locally based corporate sponsor Xcel Energy purchased the naming rights from the outset at a cost of \$75 million spread over 25 years.

The original design included plenty of rock and comfortable tones without much marble or glass. It was important to stand apart and go against any of the color schemes or trends of the day.

"Remember how back in the '80s everyone was going with teal and mauve?" Ibister asked. "Had they gone with a trend like that it would have looked out of date immediately. This was designed as a hockey cathedral. It's what the people wanted."

The people do matter at Xcel Energy Center, sometimes referred to locally simply as "The X" although Larson understandably prefers for folks to call the venue by the full sponsor's name.

"Before we even played our first game, the team retired the jersey number 1 that hangs in the rafters today and is for the fans," Larson said. "Our fans are the lifeblood of the organization. You have to make them number 1."

The venue's unique design features an open concourse bowl that contains no hard

walls and allows people to see fully across the arena. The venue was constructed at angles which creates a feel of being on top of the action, even from upper level seats.

"When I take people on a tour, I often talk about the whole design concept idea and how it works into our relationships with our fans," Ibister said. "There are connections. From one level to another you can see down, you can see up, you can see through into the concourse. There are a lot of portables and it's very open. It's a very fluid space that allows fans to be fairly connected regardless where they're sitting."

It's not just hockey fans who have raved about the venue's design, either.

"Pavarotti gave a performance in the early years and he talked about how it reminded him of an old-style opera house in that there wasn't a section leading to a section but was an overlapping feeling of each section and how everybody was on top of the stage. That's exactly what we wanted," Ibister said.

The venue includes three levels and one suite level. As dynamics have changed over the years with suite purchases and rentals, so too has the design of those suites.

"We had some loge boxes at the club level in the arena, and removed three sections of seats on

the west end club level and replaced them with loge seating called the Bud Light Top Shelf Lounge," Larson said. "They have been very popular. It's an all-inclusive purchase and a four-seat loge. Think of them like mini-suites with all-inclusive food and beverage. It's a buying trend. It is more affordable and smaller for companies or individuals who don't need the bigger suite."

Technology is one of the bigger endeavors and points of emphasis for both present and future and is important to keep the venue relevant and premier.

"I would say that the interaction with how guests use technology is one of our biggest focuses," Ibister said. "Our technology infrastructure is about Wi-Fi and apps and giving our fans an opportunity to make an even greater connection to each other and the team."

Looking ahead, Ibister said that technology must be about the guest experience. If that means trying to guess about the dollar return on Wi-Fi, so be it.

Other additions include a new point of sale system. Bypass installed 250 POS units distributed throughout the arena over a five-day period in July, which went into service at the July 31 5 Seconds of Summer concert. Leading up to the installation, the Bypass services team worked with the Levy team to ensure all menu and inventory data was compiled and entered accurately.

"The Bypass business model diverges from traditional offerings by distributing hardware at cost and charging for software as a service over a specific license term," said Chad Weiner, vice president of sales for Bypass. "Periodic software updates are made available during the period of the software license. This approach recognizes that a point of sale/commerce solution must evolve with the changing objectives of the venue."

And that objective is putting the fan first, as Ibister and Larson emphasized.

Other additions include new video boards and ribbon boards installed by Daktronics and new seating handled by Irwin Seating. In order to make all of this function, Larson's staff includes 55 fulltime employees and more than 400 who work part time.

"There's the sentiment that maybe it is time to modernize this or get away from the kitschiness of that," Ibister said. "I'm sure there will be some serious discussions both from a fan perspective and internally because it is beloved as it is. It will be an interesting 15 years going forward."



Interviewed for this story: **Jack Larson**, (651) 265-4869; **Jim Ibister**, (651) 602-6000; **Chad Weiner**, (512) 960-2142

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