



IOWA ARENA READY FOR RIBBON CUTTING AFTER OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

BY FRANCISCO RENDON

THE CITY OF Coralville, Iowa, is getting a new arena as the centerpiece for its Iowa River Landing mixed-use development, come hell or high water.

In the face of a global pandemic and, more recently, a “derecho,” a freak storm on Aug. 10 that produced 100 mph winds equal to a Category 2 hurricane, the city’s new Xtream Arena powered by Mediacom and GreenState Family Fieldhouse are persevering and planning a Sept. 17 ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The arena, which was not damaged by the storm, is surrounded by and integrated with businesses such as restaurants, hotels and an antique car museum as well as housing in Coralville, a suburb of Iowa City in eastern Iowa. The vision throughout the project has been for a multipurpose

XTREAM CASE: The new 5,100-seat Xtream Arena, shown in a recent construction cam shot, is moving ahead toward a Sept. 17 opening.

arena to serve as the centerpiece to the development, said Lonnie Laffen, president of JLG Architects, the firm that designed the complex. The plan is to attract visitors from throughout the Midwest for sports and live entertainment so they can stay in the hotels and patronize the local businesses, essentially making a weekend out of what might normally be a daytrip.

The Iowa River Landing development plans date back to the 1990s but stalled after a massive flood devastated the region in 2008.

According to the city of Coralville, more than \$190 million has gone into the development throughout the years. Now the time has come for the \$50 million arena to take its place as the crown jewel.

“This is a really amazing development that the city of Coralville has been working on for 20 years,” Laffen said. “It was an industrial brownfield. They’ve been buying up properties, moving them out, cleaning them up and redeveloping it into a retail/hotel/commercial district.

“There’s not a lot of arenas that are so integrally mixed with hotel, office, retail, museum meeting space,” he said. “And the site was really steep. Along the street, it’s really a retail development. You walk in and inside it’s an arena. It’s interconnected and so

convenient to all the other restaurants and shops that were already there.”

Mortenson was the builder on the project. ArenaCo, a local nonprofit group, is overseeing the project. Stafford Sports fills the role of owner’s representative.

Sports tenants for the 5,100-seat arena include the women’s volleyball and men’s club ice hockey programs from the University of Iowa, whose main campus is in adjacent Iowa City. Also in the mix are amateur wrestling, basketball and soccer, concerts from international promoters like Live Nation and AEG as well as local players like Police Productions and Pepper Entertainment, and special events like graduation ceremonies.

The arena is managed by Spectra.

General Manager Jack Ligon, who worked at SeatGeek Stadium in Bridgeview, Ill., and Yuengling Center in Tampa, Fla., said that the global pandemic has disrupted the programming the Xtream Arena team was hoping to have — the University of Iowa has postponed all fall sporting events — but that they are trying to find ways to help people safely get to know the arena.

“While we are not going to be as busy as we anticipated in the fall, we are still working hard to find programming,” Ligon said. “It’s really important from our perspective that

GREEN HOUSE:
GreenState Family Fieldhouse supports the arena with 100,000 square feet of program space.



as we do open we are making sure that the community feels safe and comfortable.”

The staff is using guidelines from Spectra and incorporating local recommendations on fighting the spread of COVID-19 in its preparations.

Until business can resume — or in the arena’s case, begin — as normal, the venue is holding all events with reduced capacity.

The first major happening on the schedule is the USA Wrestling Senior Nationals Oct. 9-11, and the IWCOA Iowa Girls High School State Wrestling Championships is set for January.

While not as robust as originally envisioned, there is also content planned for engaging the local community at the GreenState Family Fieldhouse, a competition space with a wood floor large enough for five basketball courts, which can be connected to the entire arena space or segmented off for separate events. The fieldhouse is also adjacent to the Iowa Fitness & Sports Performance Institute and will provide a space for that business to host athletic and training events.

GreenState Credit Union signed a 10-year, \$1.4 million naming-rights deal for the fieldhouse, according to local reports.

With Aramark handling concessions and a variety of businesses surrounding the arena, Ligon is confident that whenever audiences can begin entering the venue en masse, they will have great experiences and look forward to coming back.

The local businesses “have been great partners. A big part of our job, and a lot of the idea behind the arena coming in, is to provide content for people coming to the IRL, outside of just stores,”

he said. “It’s been good to find ways to work together, especially in the times we are in now, asking how we can support each other to mutually benefit everyone. It’s been a good process, and I think it’s only going to continue to get better, with this opening and then getting through the pandemic.”

A key feature of the venue, Ligon said, is its versatility in terms of content and scale. “We can do a wide range of different types of events. We can do some youth programming (in the fieldhouse). We have the multiuse arena for hockey games, volleyball, concerts. I think the versatility, the wide range of events, when you look at the entire complex ... from small to large, I think that’s what’s going to be unique to us.”

Ligon doesn’t shy away from the development’s similarities to LA Live surrounding the Staples Center in Los Angeles, but said the development of businesses before the big arena has set Xstream Arena up for success, as opposed to other imitators of the downtown Los Angeles development. “The city of Coralville did a great job,” he said. “They developed the area and then brought the arena on after there’s already retail, shops, restaurants, hotels. Sometimes cities start with the venue first and then try to bring in the other retail.”

Laffen said the venue sits on a slope and the bowl of the arena sits below ground level, so when patrons enter on the concourse, they are greeted with a full view of the arena floor. One aspect of the design he was proud of was the “blackout curtain” that drops down and is able to keep parts of the building lit or dark as necessary for different kinds of events.

“When you do a multipurpose

arena, you have to be able to make it dark from the concourses that surround it, he said. “Normally you put a wall around the inside the arena and walk through ... holes from the seating section to the back section to the concourse where the lights can be on. If it’s a true sports arena, you’ll reverse that and put the concessions on the outside of the concourse and the lights just stay on; you’re a part of the venue even when you go to the concourse.”

Laffen said, “This was unique in that we did a 50/50 mix. There’s suites on one side, and concourse lights can stay on. On the other side it is open to the arena and there is a blackout curtain that at the touch of a button, a curtain drops and closes off the concourse when you need it. During a sporting event part of it is open, but during a concert you can darken the whole space.”

An additional feature of the new venue is its Wi-Fi 6 technology, which routes and aggregates data more efficiently to provide lower latency and an overall better Wi-Fi experience for high numbers of users. This means that the Wi-Fi — provided by Mediacom Communications Corp., which bought naming rights for Xstream Arena — will allow users to have 4K video streaming, augmented reality and virtual reality capability, and better battery life thanks to 1-gigabyte circuits installed by Mediacom.

The ability to demonstrate the power of Mediacom Wi-Fi’s technology was part of the company’s decision to sign on as the naming-rights partner, said Phyllis Peters, Mediacom communications director, and it hopes that visitors’ experience with the Wi-Fi will leave an impression and perhaps persuade them to try Mediacom

for their home service.

Xstream is a Mediacom brand name for internet, TV and phone services. The naming-rights deal is 10 years in length. Financial terms were not disclosed.

“Internet traffic from 2017 to 2022 is estimated to be higher than the previous 32 previous years since the internet became a thing,” Peters said. “It just keeps going up exponentially. That’s why you have to have more powerful devices, why we have to change our devices and technology, and it’s why new technology has to be developed and created.”

“You might be a dad watching your kid and want to post on Twitter. But simultaneously, when you do that Twitter post, you’ve been watching a high-def video and you want to keep doing that, too. You can multitask and have an uninterrupted, high-performing connection at your fingertips.”

Ultimately, when discussing the future of the arena, Ligon acknowledged the short term remains full of questions, as it is unclear when live events will be able to resume and at what scale, but he is proud that the team’s plans have not been delayed by the challenges thrown at them.

The Xstream team was cautiously optimistic about the future. Ligon said plans always can change during the pandemic but they agreed pushing ahead with the September opening made sense.

“We’re going to face our situation head-on and continually look at our plans. We will adjust and pivot as new things come,” he said. “That’s the most important thing we’ve all learned: pivot. We think we’re going to go one route, but when something comes at us, we shift and make the adjustments necessary.”



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