

TICKETING STAR AWARDS

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TAMPA GOES BOOM!



MARKET
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TAMPA | ST. PETE



WINNING TIME



PRO SPORTS BOOM IN THE TAMPA AREA IS LIFTING SPIRITS AND SETTING THE BAR HIGH

BY DON MURET

THE TAMPA-ST. PETERSBURG region stands among Florida's idyllic destinations, known for its sparkling beaches, gorgeous sunsets and signature tourist attractions. Sports development for the most part has grown in tandem with the market's big league teams over the past 25 years.

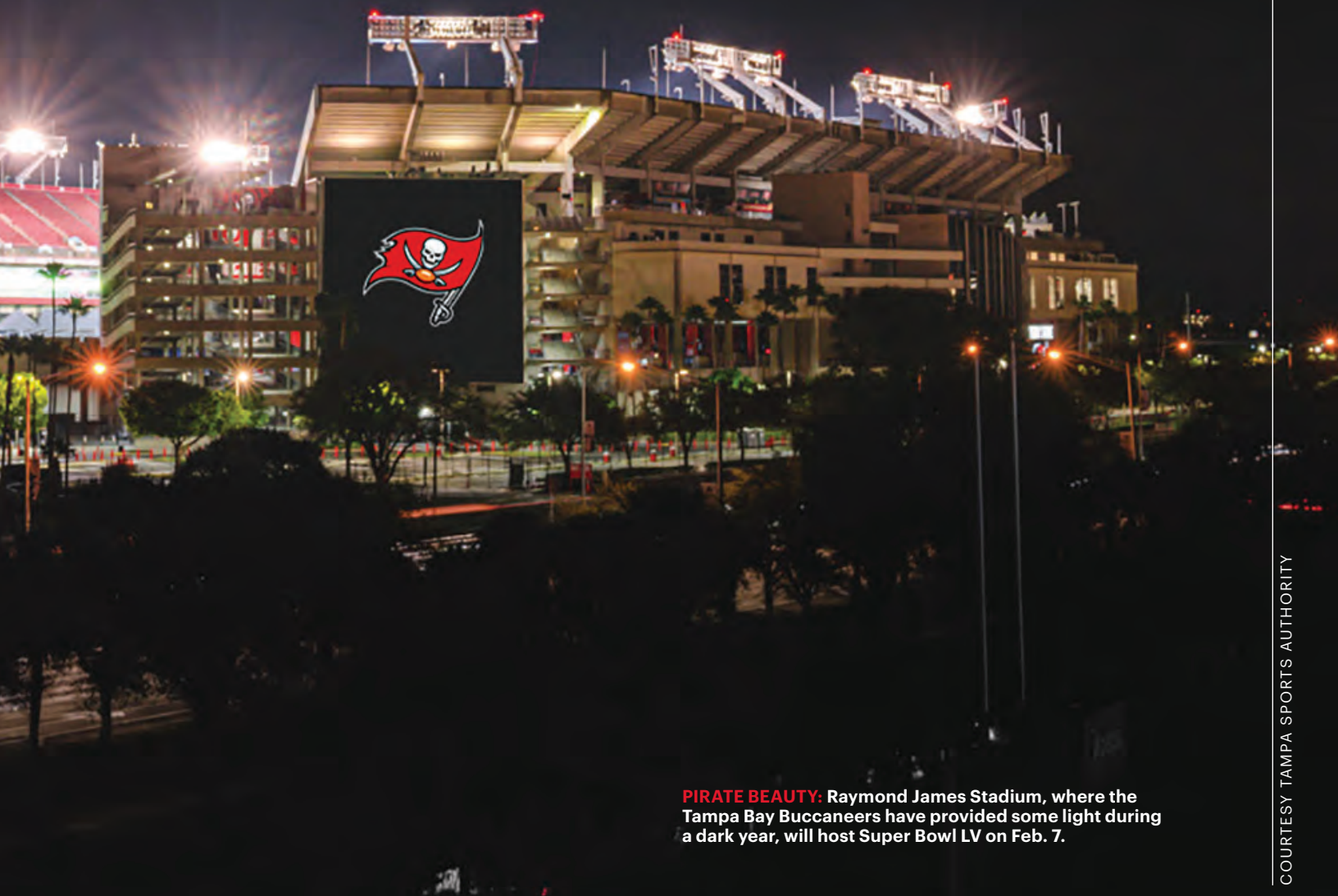
On both fronts, it's proved to be a winning combination of late. In September, the Tampa

Bay Lightning won their second Stanley Cup title in 16 years, competing in a bubble format at Edmonton's Rogers Place after the pandemic put the 2019-20 season on ice for five months.

In St. Pete, the Tampa Bay Rays reached the 2020 World Series after playing a shortened 60-game regular season. They lost to the Los Angeles Dodgers in six games at neutral site Globe Life Field in Arlington, Texas. At presstime, the

Tampa Bay Buccaneers were one win away from reaching Super Bowl LV in their hometown under ageless quarterback Tom Brady.

Even the Tampa Bay Rowdies, a member of the USL Championship soccer league owned by the Rays, advanced to the title game before USL officials canceled the Oct. 31 match due to COVID-19 cases on the Rowdies team. Toward the end of the 2020 season, the Rowdies played a few matches with limited fans at Al



PIRATE BEAUTY: Raymond James Stadium, where the Tampa Bay Buccaneers have provided some light during a dark year, will host Super Bowl LV on Feb. 7.

COURTESY TAMPA SPORTS AUTHORITY

PROVIDING SOME GOOD NEWS

Across the region, the four teams lifted spirits through the doom and gloom of the lengthy pandemic.

"All the teams in the market had tremendous success," said Bill Walsh, the Rays' vice president of strategy and development. "It was wonderful to watch the Lightning's run and we almost got there ourselves. In many ways, it picked us up as a community."

To keep up with emerging trends tied to the fan experience, both Raymond James Stadium, where the Bucs play, and Amalie Arena, home of the Lightning and a leading concert venue, have gone through \$100 million-plus renovations over the past decade.

Most recently, both buildings, as well as Tropicana Field, the Rays' stadium, have gone through extensive COVID upgrades, driven in part by the region's effort to keep tourism dollars flowing despite the restrictions across the country that have made it difficult to generate revenue.

Florida, a state marked by fewer restrictions than most of the country, does not have a mandate requiring face coverings in public. Gov. Ron DeSantis allowed venues to reopen at full capacity, despite the state recording some of the highest rates of coronavirus.

In the Tampa Bay region, venues and public officials were prudent as they started to reopen for business in the fall, going with partial attendance in the range of 22% to 23% for NFL games, which amounted to about 16,000 fans attending Buccaneers contests.

Raymond James Stadium served as the model for all area venues post-pandemic.

"From start to end, masks are required," said Eric Hart, president and CEO of the Tampa Sports Authority, governing body of Raymond James Stadium. "The biggest challenge that buildings have faced is fighting the whole mask issue. We've done pretty well."

The 65,890-seat stadium, site of Super Bowl LV, will have attendance capped at 22,000, which includes 7,500 vaccinated health



MIND THE CHANDELIER: The Toronto Raptors, in town for the NBA season to eliminate the need to cross the border during the pandemic, have practice courts in a hotel ballroom across from Amalie Arena.

care workers with complimentary tickets to the game. The NFL determined that number in working with the authority and local health officials, Hart said.

In Hillsborough County, where Tampa is situated, local leaders pushed for the stadium, arena and Steinbrenner Field, the New York Yankees' spring training facility, to receive millions of dollars in CARES Act funding to help pay for touchless technology, improved air flow and other protective measures against coronavirus.

"Our county officials took the position that they wanted us to keep people employed," Hart said. "We had several thousand people working at every NFL game, trying to do as many events as we possibly can, safely. We're happy that our health department has indicated there have not been any high contacts coming out of our venues."

A NEW TEAM IN TOWN

In downtown Tampa, Amalie Arena added a second tenant during the pandemic. The Toronto Raptors, Canada's NBA team, decided to play a good portion of their 2021 home games in Tampa as part of a mini-bubble format to cut down on potential spread of the virus from travel between two countries.

They set up temporary residency at the new JW Marriott Water Street Tampa, a 500-room lodge that opened in December across the street from the arena. The Raptors converted a large ballroom into two practice courts. Other hotel spaces were made into a locker room, weight and conditioning area and coaches' offices.

The Raptors considered three cities before selecting Tampa.

For the Lightning, it helped that team President Steve Griggs was among the first 15 employees hired by Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment back in 1994. The Canada native retains strong connections with the ownership of the Raptors and Leafs.

"The setup for them was perfect," Griggs said.

Toronto played a few home games at Amalie Arena with crowds limited to 4,000 before officials hit the pause button on fans attending games due to new spikes in COVID cases in January. The switch came just a few days before the Lightning's first regular-season home game.

Together, the Lightning, public officials and the team's three health care partners made that difficult decision, recognizing there will be additional losses in event-related revenue. They hope to reopen the arena with fans for NBA and NHL games by March, team executives said.

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT

Lightning owner Jeff Vinik sees the long-term play, revolving around a hot team and the Water Street District, the \$3.5 billion mixed-use development next to the arena. He's spearheading the 40-acre district with Strategic Property Partners, whose investors include Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates.

Nine buildings are now under construction. The first of three phases, encompassing three residential complexes, should be completed by early 2022. The vision is to have 3,000 to 4,000 people living in the district, Griggs said.

The Residences at the Tampa

Edition, the first residential/hotel project, opened a sales office in November, with 37 condominiums starting at \$2 million, according to a story in the Tampa Bay Times.

All told, the district is projected to take up 9 million square feet by the time the project is completed in 2027. It is designed to strengthen Tampa Bay's emergence as a sports and entertainment bulkhead with bars, restaurants, office space, residential and three hotels, including the JW Marriott.

"It took a bold vision and the right resources, plus a commitment from the city and county and Jeff to continue to do great things in this community," Griggs said. "It was already sitting here and just needed someone to connect all the key pillars."

Griggs has seen downtown Tampa evolve after the Lightning hired him in 2010, five months after Vinik acquired the team. The old Channelside Mall near the arena had fallen on hard times, and coming out of the recession, the venue had fallen behind on fan amenities.

"It was just the arena with 40 acres of barren parking," he said. "We had the convention center, the history center, aquarium and the port where the cruise ships come in. The bones were there; it was just a matter of building everything in between and turning it into a (true) district."

Sparkman Wharf, the initial piece of development, replaced the old mall and opened in November 2018. It's designed as a casual pop-up-style environment with local chefs running street food destinations in shipping containers, plus a craft beer garden, office lofts and lawn space to accommodate live music and fitness

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LIGHTING ROUND: A rendering shows Phase 1 of the Water Street District, a downtown development area next to the arena district and led by Lightning owner Jeff Vinik with Strategic Property Partners.

events. Sparkman Wharf's retail and office space is just starting to open, project officials said.

Over the past 20 years, mixed-use projects tied to sports venues have been a defining trend across North America. In Tampa, the point of difference is the district sits right on the city's waterfront, providing an authentic coastal vibe unlike its landlocked counterparts, Griggs said.

"There's a real sense of health and wellness because we are on the water," he said. "It's different than up north. There's a real focus on brand ethos and turning Water Street into a district and we're a part of it."

Amalie Arena, after going through extensive renovations, has driven most of the development, due in part to the Lightning's success on the ice. The team has sold out 250 consecutive games at the 20,500-capacity

venue. All told, 1.8 million people annually attend events at the 25-year-old arena, including concerts and family shows.

LAB FOR INNOVATIONS

Across the bay, there's a much different dynamic going on with the Rays in terms of the facility equation.

They've been trying for the better part of 15 years to build a new ballpark to replace 31-year-old Tropicana Field, which stands as Major League Baseball's only indoor facility with a fixed roof.

The Rays' lease at the city-owned stadium runs through the 2027 season and they remain committed to pursuing a proposal to split home games at new open-air ballparks in St. Petersburg and Montreal, Walsh said.

The team announced the concept in June 2019 and there has been no movement to build new stadiums in

either market. St. Petersburg Mayor Rick Kriseman has dismissed the idea, stating the Rays must adhere to the lease terms before considering a move elsewhere.

Over the past few years, the Rays have used The Trop, where average paid attendance has declined over the past decade from 23,000 to 14,700 in 2019, as a laboratory for innovation and experimentation. Two years ago, prior to the pandemic, they were among the first teams in big league sports to go completely cashless in-venue.

"Once you train fans and they get used to being in a cash-free environment, there are a lot of interesting things you can do with mobile ordering and digital wallets and fan rewards and loyalty and all of that," Walsh said. "We're going to be moving in that space this season."

Advancing to the World Series provided a nice bump in merchan-

dise sales for the Rays for what was otherwise a "pretty devastating" year financially for the organization without fans attending games, he said.

The Rays, in conjunction with Rank & Rally, Levy's merchandise group, reopened the team store at Tropicana Field in August. During the postseason, there were long lines of fans standing 6 feet apart outside the doors waiting to buy the latest gear, Walsh said.

"There was a lot of hunger in the community to just interact with the club and the brand," he said.

The retail demand led to the Rays launching a new concept called "Rays and Rowdies on the Road."


The focus is on fan engagement, tied to a new website and a branded merchandise trailer set up over lunch hour in downtown Tampa and the new pier in St. Petersburg, among other sites. Player appear-



ances, plus Raymond, the Rays' furry blue mascot, are part of the retail caravan.

"We started off with tents, doing it as quickly as we could, and then got the trailer toward the end of the postseason," Walsh said. "We did about a half-dozen events in December and into New Year's Eve. We'll ramp back up as we get into February and the start of the season."

Overall, sports executives forecast continued growth for Tampa-St. Petersburg as an entertainment destination.

"What we're creating here with our district and the whole region itself is attractive," Griggs said. "We have another crack at the College Football Playoff, WrestleMania 37, Frozen Four and Women's Final Four. Our building alone is booked (most years) for an NCAA event." 



RAYMOND ON THE ROAD: Raymond, the Tampa Rays mascot, is part of a new fan engagement campaign built around a traveling merchandise trailer.

UP' BLOWN 'IT'S

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Jannus Live is a
2,000-capac-
ity club in St.
Petersburg.

TAMPA'S DIVERSE MARKET IS ENJOYING A MUSIC BOOM

BY ERIC RENNER BROWN

TAMPA BAY'S SPORTS market, which includes the NHL's 2020 Stanley Cup winner, the MLB's 2020 American League pennant winner, a team playing for the NFC title, and Super Bowl LV in February, is just one aspect of its booming live sector.

"I can't explain how much it's changed, how much it's blown up," says Summer Bohnenkamp, vice president of programming and marketing at the Straz Center for the Performing Arts, situated in downtown Tampa on the eastern bank of the Hillsborough River.

"It's barely recognizable," Bohnenkamp says. "Downtown Tampa, it just used to go to sleep at 5 o'clock. Everything was dark. If you were coming to the show at the Straz Center, you were alone downtown. Now, we have a vibrant nightlife."

Tampa and St. Petersburg, a half-hour drive across Tampa Bay, rank third and fifth in population among Florida's cities, and the metro area's population of 3.2 million — more than those of Denver, St. Louis, and Baltimore — is second only to Miami's within Florida.

"The Tampa Bay market is certainly one of the most vibrant and strongest markets in the state," says AEG Presents senior vice president John Valentino, who has booked shows in Florida for more than 40 years, including a three-decade stint with legendary regional promoter Fantasma Productions. (see story, Page 32.)

A TASTE OF EVERYTHING

More than anything, the Tam-

pa Bay market is characterized by its diversity. While Miami is known for Latin, hip-hop, and EDM, and Jacksonville has more in common with the country and rock inclinations of other Deep South markets, Tampa Bay offers up something for everyone, from classic rock icons to touring Broadway.

"The Tampa Bay demographic is very diverse and very vast," says Steve Minick, director of entertainment at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa, which sits on the city's eastern edge. "You can be in an area that's very rural very quickly, just outside of the Tampa Bay metro, or you can be in a very urban environment very quickly."

Tampa Bay's varied nature means that sometimes the industry's conventional wisdom doesn't hold true in the market.

"We've always felt that our market here was a very unique market, and I think is still in a lot of ways," says Rob Douglas, director of music operations at Jannus Live, a lauded 2,000-capacity club in St. Petersburg. "You can't take anything for granted, at least in the Tampa Bay market, because something may be trending wonderfully elsewhere, but when they get to us, it collapses — or the opposite."

Like other Florida markets, geography plays a key role in determining Tampa Bay's bookings.

"If you can't get them four or five dates up and down the state — or at least the money that is the equivalent to that — then it's like,

'Guess what! We're not coming to Florida!'" explains Douglas, who's been booking shows from punk to reggae to jazz at Jannus since the mid-'80s.

If traveling down the Florida Panhandle isn't financially worthwhile for an artist, Douglas says, "they dip into Jacksonville and then just head west or north" to other regional markets like Atlanta and New Orleans.

Still, north-south Interstate 75 and east-west Interstate 4 run through the market, making it a convenient stop for any tour embarking on a Florida leg.

"What attracts tours to come through here is that we are right off major crossroads that get to all these other destinations," Minick says. "We're really poised locationwise."

(Sources agree that, for most acts at the club level or above, location within the market doesn't matter much — fans will generally go from St. Petersburg to Tampa or vice versa to see shows.)

DIVERSITY OF VENUES

Once in the market, artists have plenty of options. Raymond James Stadium also hosts marquee music talent when it comes through town; Taylor Swift set

the stadium's single-night gross record with an August 2018 show that raked in \$7.2 million.

In recent years, Amalie Arena, which typically holds 14,000 to 16,000 for concerts, has hosted talent from Elton John to Chance the Rapper to Eric Church, while Yuengling Center, which accommodates about half that, has presented shows by artists such as Lizzo and Old Dominion.

While the market's Live Nation-operated shed, MidFlorida Credit Union Amphitheatre, stages plenty of rock and hip-hop, country is its forte, with recent box-office highlights dominated by the likes of Luke Bryan, Sam Hunt, Jason Aldean and Dierks Bentley.

Below the market's largest rooms, acts of all stripes can find homes among Tampa Bay's rich tapestry of theaters, performing arts centers, and clubs.

Among Tampa Bay's most acclaimed spaces is the 2,200-capacity Ruth Eckerd Hall, located in the coastal enclave of Clearwater, north of St. Petersburg. It opened in 1983.

The theater hosts a little of everything, from traveling shows — recent highlights include eight-show runs of "The Book of

"Downtown Tampa, it just used to go to sleep at 5 o'clock. Everything was dark."

— SUMMER BOHNENKAMP



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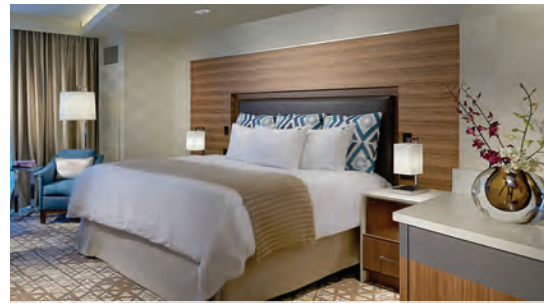
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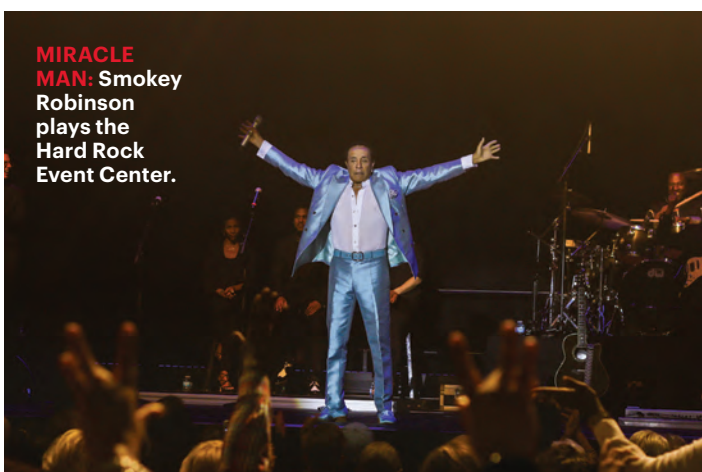
MAJOR VENUES IN THE AREA

Based on box-office data reported to Pollstar 2000-2019.

MAP#	VENUE	CITY	TYPE	CAPACITY	AVG. GROSS PER SHOW	AVG. TICKETS PER SHOW	TICKET AVG. PRICE
1	Amalie Arena	Tampa	Arena	20,000	\$427,036	7,536	\$56.66
2	Brass Mug	Tampa	Club	650	\$2,279	192	\$11.87
3	David A. Straz Jr. Center for the Performing Arts	Tampa	Theater	2,610	\$110,205	1,846	\$59.70
4	Cuban Club	Tampa	Club	6,300	\$96,447	2,863	\$33.68
5	Dallas Bull	Tampa	Club	2,165	\$14,853	1,187	\$12.52
6	George M. Steinbrenner Field	Tampa	Stadium	10,000	\$1,034,686	14,929	\$69.31
7	MidFlorida Credit Union Amphitheatre	Tampa	Amphitheater	20,000	\$477,539	11,761	\$40.60
8	New World Brewery	Tampa	Club	250	\$1,052	102	\$10.31
9	Raymond James Stadium	Tampa	Stadium	65,422	\$4,335,573	46,049	\$94.15
10	Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino	Tampa	Theater	1,500	\$68,760	1,534	\$44.82
11	Skipper's Smokehouse	Tampa	Club	700	\$9,323	526	\$17.72
12	Tampa Theatre	Tampa	Theater	1,238	\$34,949	1,010	\$34.60
13	The Attic	Tampa	Club	175	\$3,467	105	\$32.89
14	Orpheum	Tampa	Club	720	\$8,577	459	\$18.67
15	The Ritz Ybor	Tampa	Club	1,786	\$22,722	947	\$24.00
16	Yuengling Center	Tampa	Arena	10,500	\$160,398	4,079	\$39.32
17	Capitol Theatre	Clearwater	Club	800	\$26,976	491	\$54.91
18	Coachman Park	Clearwater	Amphitheater	13,500	\$181,163	4,530	\$39.99
19	Ruth Eckerd Hall	Clearwater	Theater	2,180	\$72,432	1,444	\$50.16
20	Al Lang Stadium	St. Petersburg	Stadium	12,000	\$273,997	4,888	\$56.06
21	Jannus Live	St. Petersburg	Club	2,000	\$27,923	1,240	\$22.52
22	Local 662	St. Petersburg	Club	250	\$3,392	245	\$13.86
23	State Theatre	St. Petersburg	Club	705	\$8,576	481	\$17.82
24	Mahaffey Theater	St. Petersburg	Theater	2,031	\$78,176	1,415	\$55.25
25	Tropicana Field	St. Petersburg	Stadium	50,000	\$169,973	2,713	\$62.66



WILD NIGHTS: A four-night stand by Van Morrison (left) in 1997 “was a catalyst in changing the way people perceive Ruth Eckerd Hall,” says the venue’s Bobby Rossi.



MIRACLE MAN: Smokey Robinson plays the Hard Rock Event Center.

Mormon” and “Kinky Boots” — to esteemed musicians.

“We’ll go from Jane’s Addiction to Tony Bennett, and that’s the direction that really has worked really, really well for us in this community,” says Ruth Eckerd Hall director of entertainment Bobby Rossi, who joined the hall in 1996. “Audiences, we learned, will come. They really didn’t care what you did the night before or what you did the night after.”

In the ’90s, Rossi identified that many arena-level rock acts were transitioning to more intimate, multnight runs at theaters and performing arts centers, and made that a core part of Ruth Eckerd’s business.

A four-night Van Morrison run in 1997 “was a catalyst in changing the way people perceive Ruth Eckerd Hall,” and in January 2017, the musician returned to Ruth Eckerd for three nights, setting the venue’s box-office record with \$1.5 million grossed.

NOT JUST A THEATER

Ruth Eckerd’s influence extends well beyond the walls of the hall itself under the umbrella of Ruth Eckerd Hall Presents, which ranked No. 81 on Pollstar’s year-end worldwide promoters list in 2019. The company books Clearwater’s 700-cap Bilheimer Capitol Theatre, a historic facility that turns 100 in March; like Ruth Eckerd Hall, the Capitol has found success booking reduced-capacity shows during the pandemic.

For the last decade-plus, Ruth Eckerd Hall on the Road has staged gigs at traditional concert spaces such as Amalie Arena, Tampa Theatre, and Clearwa-

ter’s Coachman Park, and has also brought music to baseball games at Tropicana Field, the St. Petersburg home of the Tampa Bay Rays, and Innisbrook Resort, which hosts the PGA Tour’s Val-spar Championship. Ruth Eckerd Hall Presents is even putting on an invite-only Dan + Shay show for 500 special guests the afternoon of Super Bowl LV.

“My mantra has been, ‘We’re promoters first, and we have venues,’” Rossi says. “We try to be wherever we can. We’ll do a show on the head of a pin if we can.”

Across the bay, Bohnenkamp oversees Straz’s six performance spaces, which include the 2,600-capacity Morsani Hall and the 1,000-capacity Ferguson Hall.

Like Ruth Eckerd, touring Broadway and stand-up comedy are reliable bookings at Straz, which opened in 1987. But over the last decade, the venue has diversified, booking edgier comedy (Iliza Shlesinger), family programming (“Paw Patrol Live!”), and hip young acts (Bon Iver, The

Weeknd, J. Cole).

“The folks who are coming to our venues have become significantly younger,” says Bohnenkamp, adding that Straz has made an effort so people don’t “see it so much as a formal kind of venue, which was certainly a reputation we had in our first 10 or 15 years.”

East of downtown, the Seminole Hard Rock seems poised to become a formidable player in the market post-pandemic. Among the buzziest aspects of the property’s recent \$750 million expansion project was the Hard Rock Event Center, a 1,500-capacity space that opened with a Keith Urban concert on Oct. 4, 2019, and subsequently hosted legends such as Smokey Robinson and George Clinton before the pandemic forced its temporary closure.

“We’re looking to give [fans] a one-of-a-kind show that they’re not able to see anywhere else,” Minick says. “Our worst seat in our place is the best seat in an arena.”

Also included in the renovation: A new 20,000-square-foot outdoor pool area modeled after

Las Vegas-style pool parties, where top-tier DJs like Tiësto, Alesso, and Snoop Dogg (as DJ Snoopadelic) have played to audiences of 3,000. Minick describes it as “a home run in the market.”

THE FUTURE IS HERE

It’s a far cry from the outré club scene that Tampa Bay was known for in the ’80s, when Douglas and Rossi both worked with Valentino at Fantasma.

Back then, Douglas would regularly slap local favorites on as support to the national tours that passed through Jannus, and he’d readily create unusual pairings — one late ’80s Jannus co-headlining show consisted of The Neville Brothers and Was (Not Was) — when two artists found themselves in the market.

Today, the local music scene has diminished in clout, though clubs like Jannus, 400-cap Crowbar, and 1,500-cap Ritz Ybor still offer smaller-ball alternatives to the market’s higher-profile arenas and theaters.

Jannus, a courtyard in the center of a city block, holds particular cachet regionally, and has hosted just about every major act on its way up — or down, Douglas jokes — over its three-and-a-half decades in operation.

Jannus and small venues like it will play a key role as the Tampa Bay music market looks to rebound from the pandemic — and navigate the “disconnect between federal, state, county, and municipal regulations ... that are thwarting our ability to carry on,” according to Douglas.

“We’re taking the risk on,” he says, “because the larger companies just aren’t quite back in the ballgame yet.” ▀



AEG PRESENTS' VALENTINO:

Tampa Big for All Kinds of Music



BY ERIC RENNER BROWN

IF YOU'VE SEEN a show in Florida over the last four decades, there's a reasonable chance John Valentino had a hand in it.

From 1979 to 2008, Valentino worked alongside Jon Stoll at Fantasma Productions, helping to make Florida's music market the powerhouse it is today. After Stoll's untimely death in 2008, Valentino joined AEG Live, now AEG Presents, as senior vice president of its Southeast region, where he has continued to shape Florida's varied markets for the last decade.

Today, Valentino and his small team ensure AEG has a presence at venues in the Tampa Bay metro area from Clearwater's 700-capacity Capitol Theatre all the way up to Raymond James Stadium.

The veteran promoter connected with VenuesNow to discuss the market's idiosyncrasies, carrying on Fantasma's spirit and an impressive string of bookings his team pulled off at Amalie Arena.

How have you seen the market evolve in recent years?

I've been in Florida my entire career. The Tampa Bay market is certainly one of the most vibrant and strongest markets in the state. There are some great venues and it's a great market for most all kinds of music.

What differentiates it from other Florida markets like your Miamis or your Jacksonvilles?

Florida is very diverse from market to market. Miami is the strongest by far for Latin music in the state. Jacksonville is much more Deep South and country-based and things like that. But all the markets are balanced and can support all styles. Tampa Bay and Central Florida — across the Orlando-Tampa Bay corridor, in the heart of Florida — is a good mix of all of those things, with the north and south as the extremes.

Can you walk me through the various venues at each tier that AEG handles in the market?

We'll start at the top with Raymond

James Stadium. The stadium is a great play for a lot of our larger shows. Amalie Arena and Yuengling Center are great venues that we frequent often. Both are viable arenas, midsize and full size. We do a lot of shows at Ruth Eckerd Hall, between them and their smaller theater, the 700-cap, seated Capitol Theatre; Ruth Eckerd, Straz and even Mahaffey to the south in St. Petersburg, all great theaters. We do a lot of shows at (2,000-capacity) Jannus Live, and that's one of the most unique and fun experiences for going to a show of any place I've been, just because it's an open outdoor courtyard area. It's been there for decades and it's in the heart of downtown St. Petersburg. We're well over 100 shows a year in that market.

How does your work with AEG today carry on Fantasma's legacy and what you learned there?

We were able to take the independent spirit of what we had at Fantasma with Jon Stoll and bring it to the next level and further develop it with the resources and support of a company like AEG Presents.

What particularly big successes have you had in the Tampa market?

Just a couple of years ago — and it was really by happenstance, and not by design — our touring division had Roger Waters on sale. Then, I worked with my office and (Marshall Arts') Barrie Marshall in bringing Paul McCartney into the state, and we played Tampa the very same weekend. Then, Rod Stewart popped up and I worked with Artist Group (International) and Dennis Arfa in bringing Rod Stewart into Tampa. Those three shows played the Amalie within a four-day period (July 8-11, 2017). We wanted to make sure we didn't cannibalize ourselves. All three of those shows sold out. That was when I was like, you know, this can be done. This market is very supportive and there is a balance there. 

FLORIDA MAN: John Valentino has been a promoter in the market for more than 40 years.

FROM SMOKED MULLET TO GREEK SPONGE DIVERS

The Outlaws' Henry Paul on Tampa/St. Pete's Many Charms

BY ANDY GENSLE

THE OUTLAWS' FOUNDER and prime mover, Henry Paul, may be one of the biggest rock stars to hail from Tampa. Though he no longer lives there, he still visits every year, partakes in its culinary delights and actively roots for its sports teams — which are having a banner year. Here, the 71-year-old recalls building his music career there as well as the region's hidden gems including smoked mullet, the historical Columbia Restaurant and, of course, Greek sponge divers.

You grew up in Tampa. What's the overarching thing people should know about Tampa?

Mine is culinary because the Spanish personality of that city is incredible. Cuban sandwiches, deviled crabs, black beans and rice, chicken and yellow rice. The Columbia Restaurant is the crown jewel of that culture and that's a very important part of Tampa.

It sounds very diverse.

Oh, very much. The cigar industry was there and the influx of Cuban workers, immigrants was huge. And Italians, and all the other familiar suspects. It has a very pronounced Latin personality.

What clubs did you play coming up?

The In-Crowd, and there was a club out on Waters Avenue, a big one called the FCA, the Florida Confederate Association. It had this big building where they had a band called Mike and the Hurricanes. They were really good.

What does its position on the Gulf Coast mean?

Smoked mullet, of all things, was a huge local, popular item. The fish is an herbivore, and they're cheap and they would smoke them. They're very oily. And you could drive around and there would be

little smokers on the side of the road and people with spray-painted signs up, “Smoked Mullet, 25 Cents.” And Tarpon Springs, which has the Greek sponge diving community. It’s very diverse.

Wait, you just said Greek sponge diving community?

Yeah, the Greek sponge diving community. It still has an incredibly European feeling. It looks like a little enclave when you go down there. The tourists love it. They have great restaurants.

So Greek sponge diving is a real thing?

That’s a real thing. And the Tampa Latin cigar rolling community is a very real thing.

What about the music scene?

There was a coffeehouse in Pinellas Park, halfway between St. Petersburg and Clearwater, called Beaux Arts, and Jim Morrison played there. All these folk music luminaries would come through and play. I would go and hang around with my guitar in the back and play with different people and eventually got the nerve to get on stage and sing two or three songs. It was a very important cultural destination, it was the Jack Kerouac crowd. Kerouac actually lived there and wound up dying in Tampa or St. Petersburg.

I know you went to NYC and moved back to Tampa with a band that eventually became The Outlaws.

We had a five-piece group and all these songs and a handful of clubs we played in North Tampa where we carved out a following.

What’s North Tampa like?

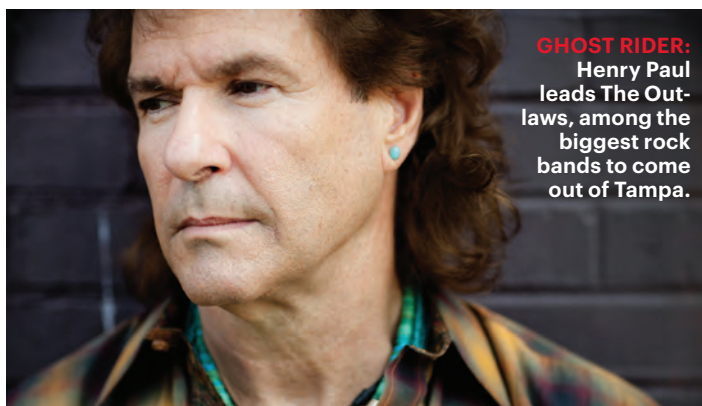
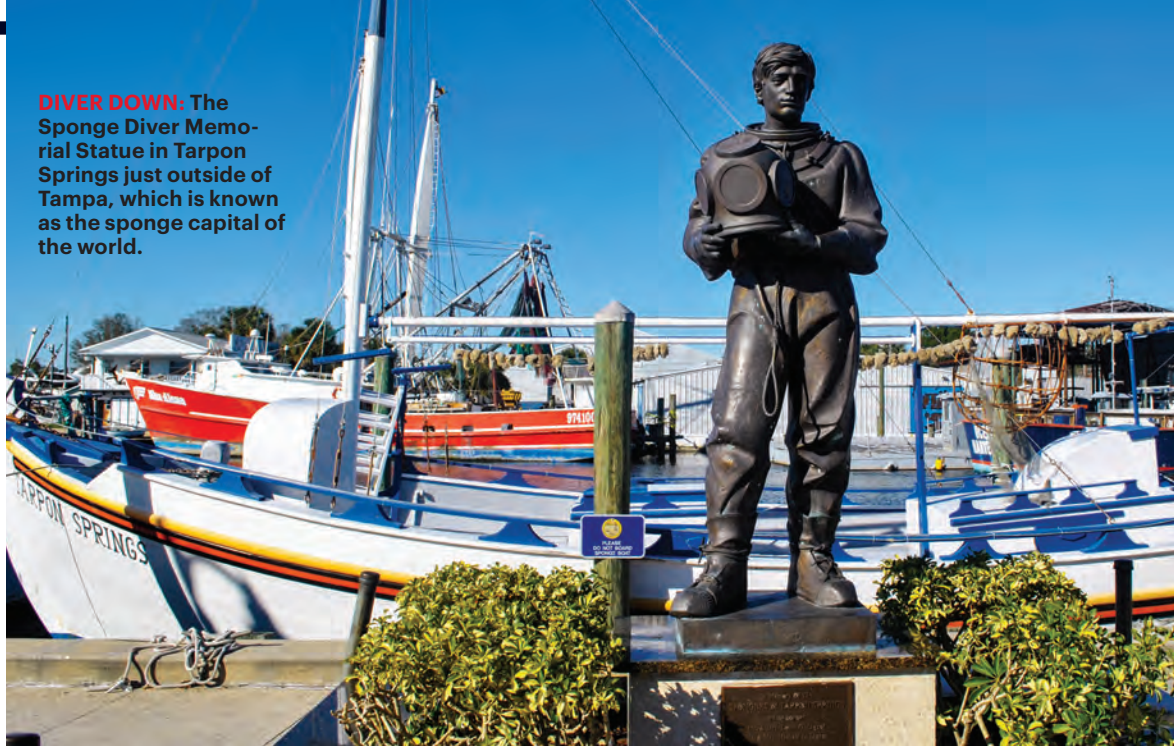
North Tampa was out near the University of South Florida and a geographical area unique unto itself. There must have been 15,000 kids going to the University of South Florida in the early ‘70s and they would patronize these bars and come see The Outlaws. There were bars like The Whipping Post, The Depot, The Losers, Mi Backyard.

When you got bigger, where did you play?

The Bayfront Center and the Lakeland Civic.

What Tampa spots would you recommend to visitors?

DIVER DOWN: The Sponge Diver Memorial Statue in Tarpon Springs just outside of Tampa, which is known as the sponge capital of the world.



GHOST RIDER: Henry Paul leads The Outlaws, among the biggest rock bands to come out of Tampa.

Ted Peters is a smoked fish restaurant in a little town between St. Pete and St. Pete Beach called Pasadena. They have smoked mackerel, smoked mullet, just the greatest little smoked fish house in the world. If you go to St. Petersburg, there’s a beach at the south end of St. Petersburg called Pass-a-Grille. Artsy fartsy, really small, really old school Florida beach community. If you go north you get to Tarpon Springs on the Anclote Bay and that’s where the sponge diving fleet is docked. There’s a barbecue restaurant in the black community on 40th Street called Big John’s Alabama Barbecue. I swear to God, on my mother’s name, it is the high tabernacle of the best barbecue on the planet in the Deep South. The Columbia Restaurant is a fine dining destination and it is to this day out of this world.

So the Rays went to the World Series, the Lightning won the Stanley Cup, the Bucs are in

the NFC title game, the Super Bowl’s there. What do you make of Tampa being Sports City USA this year?

Well, if you take it a step further, the Florida Gators (football team) won the Southeastern Conference (East Division) and played Alabama to within six points. I’m an avid sports fan. I love the Gators. I love the Bucs. I love the Rays, and I love the Lightning. I’m a Tampa fan and lo and behold, the Lightning have been threatening for a while. They had won the (Stanley) Cup and now they’ve come back and won it again. But the Rays lost (manager) Joe Maddon, and I thought, “Oh, what a horrible thing.” But the guy that took his place rebuilt that team into a contender on no money. And I don’t think Tom Brady is going to win the Super Bowl, but ...

You never know.

He’s done a good job bringing the Bucs back.

What’s in the water in Tampa? They’re just winning everything.

They’re spending money. The Rays have this beautiful farm system and these really smart guys that can make chicken salad out of chicken shit and everybody else is spending money. The Lightning are spending and the Bucs are definitely spending it. The Gators — Florida State’s in the tank right now, but the Gators are hot. The whole sports scene down there has always been — especially on the football front — something religious.

What do you think Tampa will be like as they host the Super Bowl?

We had one before that I actually went to. Back before the new stadium was built, I went and saw Washington Redskins play the Oakland Raiders.

It was the saddest Super Bowl. Redskins got destroyed by the Raiders.

The town lit up. Ybor was packed and Bern’s (Steakhouse) was packed. Tampa’s a swinging-ass town. And now it’s gotten to be such a big town. The town that I used to live in, it doesn’t exist anymore.

Do you still go to Tampa regularly?

I do. I fly there every year and I still have family down there. My wife and I go down occasionally. I drive her around and show her all the places we used to play and the house I used to live in. It’ll always be home to me. **W**



Henry Paul



Charlie Brusco



Bill Walsh



Eric Hart



Bill Wickett



Rob Douglas

RECOMMENDED: TAMPA BAY

HOT SPOTS TO HIT FROM THE MARKET'S POWER PLAYERS

We've asked some of the Tampa/St. Petersburg market's power players their favorite spots in town. While some predictably picked their own venue of interest, there are some hot takes and good advice for anyone looking to do business in or enjoy the sights and sounds of this bustling market, which has been extensively profiled in VenuesNow's and Pollstar's first Market Focus deep dive.

1) What's your favorite venue in Tampa/St. Pete to see a live music performance and why?

I can't really just call one out. There's nothing like seeing Elton John play Amalie, and then you've got the intimacy of a place like Ruth Eckerd Hall where you could see somebody like Van Morrison do three nights. And then to be at Jannus Live and have the feeling of the open floor, GA vibe there – they're all very different in their own way.

— John Valentino, Senior Vice President, AEG Presents

Ruth Eckerd Hall in Clearwater is a beautiful state of the art venue that stays in close touch with the contemporary popular music scene and books a wide variety of musical acts. It's smaller sister venue, the Capitol Theatre, in Clearwater is also a popular local music venue that provides the Tampa Bay area with a beautiful destination for live music.

— Henry Paul, The Outlaws

The Independent Bar & Cafe. I really love going out there.

— Summer Bohnenkamp, Vice President, Programming and Marketing, Straz Center for the Performing Arts

Jannus Live – the unique and intimate setting among downtown buildings, bars, and restaurants feels like you are watching the show in an urban living room.

— Bill Walsh, Vice President, Strategy and Development, Tampa Bay Rays

Capitol Theatre or Ruth Eckerd Hall in Clearwater.

— Charlie Brusco, Red Light Management

Raymond James Stadium. No feeling like 50,000 plus live fans in one of the best outdoor environments in the world. Perfect weather, great venue and awesome fans!

— Eric Hart, President and CEO, Tampa Sports Authority

Amalie Arena, of course. (Elsewhere), the weather in Tampa Bay is so good, especially from September through April, anything outdoors, no matter where it's at, is great.

One man on guitar on a beachfront balcony, in front of a bar or restaurant, is wonderful. Can't beat that. (For example) Frenchy's

on Clearwater Beach.

— Bill Wickett, Executive Vice President of Communications, Tampa Bay Lightning

Ruth Eckerd Hall and the Capitol are my favorites – they're my second and third homes. But I do have a fondness for Tampa Theatre in Tampa, because I met my wife there in the lobby 30 years ago. I was at Fantasma, promoting a Cowboy Junkies show and she came in the lobby with another friend of mine who I had known from high school and that was it.

— Bobby Rossi, Director of Entertainment, Ruth Eckerd Hall

2) Your favorite place to take in a sporting event there and why?

Tropicana Field – home to memories of some of the best sports moments I've ever experienced, including Game 7 of the 2008 ALCS, Game 162 in 2011, and the 2019 ALDS, the Trop rocks like no other venue during when it's packed with fans for big moments.

— Bill Walsh, Tampa Bay Rays

The Yankees baseball spring

training facility, George Steinbrenner Field, is a great place to see big leaguers up close and have a hot dog and a beer. The grapefruit league is the best bang for your buck and a Florida tradition dating back to 1913.

— Henry Paul, The Outlaws

Raymond James Stadium. Have been there for Bucs games and a Super Bowl!

— Charlie Brusco, Red Light Management

Still love Amalie Arena for a hockey game. Grew up playing hockey and the design and layout of Amalie is perfect for a game. With all the added amenities and promotions, one of the best in game experiences in the NHL.

— Eric Hart, Tampa Sports Authority

My team has won two Stanley Cups (calling Amalie Arena home), so I'm not going to stray from that one.

— Bill Wickett, Tampa Bay Lightning

I go to concerts so much that I really don't get to go to sporting events as much as I'd like to, but I'd have to say Amalie Arena.

— John Valentino, AEG Presents

The Amalie Arena.

— Summer Bohnenkamp, Straz Center for the Performing Arts

I really enjoy attending events at Amalie Arena. They're very professional. They're very spot on, they have a great operation. Amalie's really got some top-notch talent there. They do a great job delivering on the fan experience.

— Steve Minick, Director of Entertainment, Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Tampa

I'm a huge baseball fan, but my love affair goes through the more boutique historic spring training venues. With no offense to the major league stadiums, here is one of the few places where you can get the old time spring training baseball. I'm a massive Yankees fans, so Steinbrenner Field in Tampa obviously is very dear to me.

— Bobby Rossi, Ruth Eckerd Hall

3) What's your favorite place to eat in the area?

A lot of people will tell you Bern's Steak House. If it's a formal meal, it's got to be at Bern's.

I'm a beach guy, so anything with sand and a sunset (such as) Salt Rock Grill. Great spot. They catch all their seafood fresh daily.

— Bill Wickett, Tampa Bay Lightning

There's a great little community called Tarpon Springs which has a place called Rusty



John Valentino



Summer Bohnenkamp



Steve Minick



Bobby Rossi

Bellies Waterfront Grill, which is the local favorite that we go to.

—Bobby Rossi, Ruth Eckerd Hall

An El Cap cheeseburger (all the way, LTMO) is the ultimate comfort food. But for a night out (adhering to pandemic safety protocols of course), the menu at Brick and Mortar in downtown St. Pete is tough to beat. Pop across the street to Cycle Brewing and grab a delicious barrel aged stout for dessert.

—Bill Walsh, Tampa Bay Rays

Rooster & The Till. Chef Ferrell Alvarez was nominated for a James Beard award – he's pretty great. I'd say it's the best thing around.

—Summer Bohnenkamp, Straz Center for the Performing Arts

This is a tough one. There are so many great places to eat in Tampa. For the experience, either Sparkman Wharf or downtown Ybor. I am a big fan of Ulele for a modern twist of Florida favorites but still love going to the Columbia in Ybor. Best grouper nuggets and atmosphere is at Frenchy's in Clearwater. Nothing like a sunset at Frenchy's with some grouper and a cold beer.

—Eric Hart, Tampa

Sports Authority

Ted Peters Famous Smoked Fish. It's a little fish shack out on the beach that has the best cheeseburger in town – go figure. I don't know how that worked out.

—Rob Douglas, Jannus Live

You have to experience Bern's if you never have. Bern's Steak House is certainly the place I think that everybody should go to at least once.

—John Valentino, AEG Presents

I like Armature Works. Not a traditional restaurant. It's a place where you can get 20 different types of cuisines all under one roof.

—Steve Minick, Seminole Hard Rock

The Columbia Spanish Restaurant in Ybor City, and Bern's Steak House in South Tampa, are the two crown jewels of fine dining in Tampa. There are a number of family style Cuban restaurants led by La Tere-sita in West Tampa, and probably one of the best barbecue restaurants in the south in Big John's Alabama Barbecue on 40th Street.

—Henry Paul, The Outlaws

Bern's Steakhouse or Donatello Italian. Both old style and great food and service and wine!

—Charlie Brusco, Red Light Management

4) Your favorite Tampa/St. Pete hotel?

Le Méridien downtown is a cool spot. It used to be a courthouse. It's a neat space.

—Summer Bohnenkamp, Straz Center for the Performing Arts

The Opal Sands in Clearwater Beach is my personal favorite hotel in the area.

—John Valentino, AEG Presents

The JW Marriott that just opened in downtown Tampa and it's beautiful.

—Bill Wickett, Tampa Bay Lightning

Marriott Waterside. Have not tried the (new) JW as of yet, but my favorite place for a staycation.

—Eric Hart, Tampa Sports Authority

The Don CeSar Hotel sits on the Gulf Of Mexico in the quaint South St. Pete beach town of Pass-A-Grille. It was a boarded up abandoned property as recently as the early mid-70's. Since then it was sold to a caring developer, renovated, and has become the premier hotel destination in the bay area.

—Henry Paul, The Outlaws

There's so many wonderful hotels on the beach.

Clearwater Beach's Sandpearl Resort is the one that we love to go to for our special occasions. It's a really good quiet escape.

—Bobby Rossi, Ruth Eckerd Hall

The Don CeSar on St. Pete Beach – aka "The Don."

—Bill Walsh, Tampa Bay Rays

5) What do you think is the most quintessential place in Tampa/St. Pete everyone who visits should go see?

St. Pete has really become an amazing art destination, and that began with the opening of the Salvador Dalí museum [in 1982]. St. Pete's Salvador Dalí museum has the second largest collection of Dalí work in the world. I remember doing a show with Pearl Jam, touring the first album (in 1992). They got there and they're like, "We want to go to the Dalí museum. Who can take us to the Dalí museum?" We shuttled them all off with a runner to the Dalí museum. They spent the afternoon there and they were just happy as they could be.

—Rob Douglas, Jannus Live

Mons Venus. If you don't know about it you are too young and not in a rock and roll outfit!

—Charlie Brusco, Red Light Management

FOR BOOKING ACTS INTO HOTELS, HE APPLIES THE GOLD STANDARD

Entertainment Travel, based in Nashville, specializes in putting bands on the road for tours. And for Nick Gold, who founded the company in 1985, every tour is different.

"From an accommodation point of view there are three main things we look at: obviously, the band and its budget; the location from the hotel to the venue; and the service at the hotel being what the band is looking for," Gold said. "I'm not going to take an A-listed act and put them in a Holiday Inn (and) I'm not going to put a club act at the Ritz-Carlton."

Fortunately for Gold and bands he tours through Tampa-St. Pete, he's got plenty of options, but he names the Westin Tampa Bay, the Tampa Marriott on Water Street and the Sheraton Tampa Riverwalk as his go-to properties.

"Those are the main ones I go to, but that doesn't mean they're the only ones I go to. They specialize in entertainment and even some of my small acts, relative to what's going on in the city, it's (possible) that they could give me a rate that would work for a budgeted band. So, I'll always try them initially to see if that works because then they are getting a really good property for a low rate, and so why not?" Gold said. "If you can get into a Sheraton with a really Holiday Inn band, well then, they're living large on the road. If the budget's the same because it happens to be a good time to go into that hotel, then it's a win-win."

"Once I've looked at the band, looked at the budget, looked at where the show is, then I'm going to work through that series of hotels based on those three criteria," Gold said.

Special requests — from pet friendly hotels to 24-hour room service or an all-night gym — are common, and again, the Tampa Bay area has options to satisfy all such needs.

Aside from new health and safety protocols prompted by the pandemic, which Gold expects to remain in place "easily through 2022" and possibly beyond, Gold said smokers have been getting squeezed at all properties over the last decade at the same time that more acts are seeking things like ready access to health clubs. In that regard, the mild climate in Tampa offers a number of outdoor options for health and recreational activities for those with any spare time available, he says.

"I have had some tours that have requested the closest vegan restaurants," Gold said. "I have various different food types." 🍌

—James Zoltak