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PUBLISHER

OVG Media & Conferences

EDITORIAL

MANAGING EDITOR

Rob Knapp rknapp@oakviewgroup.com

SENIOR EDITOR

Don Muret dmuret@oakviewgroup.com

REPORTER/EDITOR

James Zoltak jzoltak@oakviewgroup.com

EDITOR/REPORTER

Eric Renner Brown ebrown@oakviewgroup.com

HOT TICKETS/TOP STOPS

teamboxoffice@pollstar.com

EUROPEAN EDITOR

Gideon Gottfried gideon@pollstar.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Christie Eliezer, Philip Brasor

DESIGN

ART DIRECTOR/DESIGNER

Pat Lewis

PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Karina Pacheco Rodriguez

ADVERTISING & MARKETING

MARKETING DIRECTOR

Samantha Le sle@oakviewgroup.com

ADVERTISING

Rich DiGiacomo rich@venuesnow.com,

310-429-3678

Brij Gosai (U.K.) brij@pollstar.com

+44 (0) 207-359-1110

To Subscribe to VenuesNow

email subscribe@venuesnow.com.

515-362-7480

For information about your Subscription
559-650-8546

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OAK VIEW GROUP

PRESIDENT, MEDIA & CONFERENCES

Ray Waddell rwaddell@oakviewgroup.com

VICE PRESIDENT, OPERATIONS, MEDIA & CONFERENCES

Jon Guynn jguynn@oakviewgroup.com

VICE PRESIDENT, SALES AND SPONSORSHIPS, MEDIA & CONFERENCES

Aki Kaneko akaneko@oakviewgroup.com

SENIOR DIRECTOR, INTEGRATED SALES

John Walberg jwalberg@oakviewgroup.com

SENIOR DIRECTOR, FINANCE

Maggie Nguyen mnguyen@oakviewgroup.com

SENIOR DIRECTOR, MEDIA & CONFERENCES

Erin Grady, egrady@oakviewgroup.com

SENIOR DIRECTOR, MEDIA & CONFERENCES

Taylor Johnson, tjohnson@oakviewgroup.com

COORDINATOR, MEDIA & CONFERENCES

Alexa Benudiz, abenudiz@oakviewgroup.com

MARKETING DESIGN MANAGER

Darrian Warach

SALES COORDINATOR, MEDIA & CONFERENCES

Elaine Lai-Lakusta elailakusta@oakviewgroup.com

BOX OFFICE LIAISON

Bob Allen ballen@oakviewgroup.com

CIRCULATION MANAGER, MEDIA & CONFERENCES

Jodi Di Pasquale jdipasquale@oakviewgroup.com

EXECUTIVE EDITOR, MEDIA & CONFERENCES

Andy Gensler agensler@oakviewgroup.com

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FRONT ROW

Venues Line Up to Offer COVID-19 Shots

Racetracks, stadiums and arenas convert to mass vaccination centers around the country

BY JAMES ZOLTAK

A GROWING NUMBER OF venues across the nation, many of them at least limited in their ability to offer their usual fare, are joining the effort to vaccinate millions of Americans against the coronavirus pandemic.

It's just the latest example of

how public assembly facilities have responded to the global health and economic crisis. Since March, stadiums, arenas, convention centers, fairgrounds and other venues have served as COVID-19 testing sites, food and personal protective equipment distribution hubs, test kit assembly lines, jury service locations and physically distanced voting and ballot processing centers. Many of the same attributes that

made venues suitable for such uses apply in terms of vaccination sites.

A coalition of live event industry leaders (including VenuesNow parent company Oak View Group) addressed a letter to President Joe Biden offering "the full support and resources of the live event industry" to help achieve the administration's ambitious mass inoculation goals. The NFL has made a similar overture and a

number of football stadiums are vaccination sites.

While vaccine supply issues and harsh winter weather have hampered some venue vaccination distribution plans, venues like Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles, Spokane Veterans Memorial Arena and Charlotte Motor Speedway in Concord, North Carolina, have begun or completed initial rounds of vaccinations.

At Charlotte Motor Speedway, where the venue has partnered with Atrium Health and Honeywell, nearly 16,000 were given the first of two vaccine doses in January, with the second doses to be administered a few weeks later, according to General Manager Greg Walter.

The racetrack, which had already teamed with Atrium — the facility's health services provider during major events — on administering COVID tests, became involved after Honeywell CEO Darius Adamczyk, Atrium CEO Eugene A. Woods and Carolina Panthers/Tepper Sports & Entertainment President Tom Glick, who all live in Charlotte, put their heads together about how they could have an impact on the vaccination rollout and reached



BANK SHOT: A line forms around the racing oval at Charlotte Motor Speedway as people await the opportunity to receive COVID-19 vaccinations.



ARMS AT THE READY: The site at Spokane Veterans Memorial Arena hoped to be giving 5,000 shots a day by the end of February.

out to the speedway.

More than a year before the pandemic struck, Charlotte Motor Speedway — which in a normal year hosts more than 100 events as well as the Coca-Cola 600 in the NASCAR Cup Series — had worked with Cabarrus County health officials to model what a mass inoculation would look like, leading to a mock drill in January of 2020.

“We already had the blueprints, if you will, of what this would look like,” Walter said.

That turned out to be fortuitous, since racetrack staff had little more than a week of lead time to put together its COVID-19 vaccination distribution plan.

Walter said that after the pandemic shut down events last March, he and the general managers of the other seven tracks across the country owned by parent company Speedway Motorsports had been challenged by President and CEO Marcus Smith to reach out and find ways to assist their various communities in coping with the crisis.

“Within two weeks we were doing mobile testing here at Charlotte Motor Speedway,” Walter said.

The track hit its key perfor-

mance indicators in terms of processes and numbers of people served, but one thing that impressed Walter was the emotion expressed by people who came to the track.

“People would drive out, you would see tears in their eyes. People were yelling, ‘God bless you. Thank you so much. I can hug my grandkids again,’” he said. “It was a very emotional event over those three days that we did not anticipate. It was incredibly rewarding that you were making a difference in the lives of people in our community. There’s a real sense of collaboration amongst other venues and entities in this town and I’m heartened to see how people want to lean in and help one another. There’s a willful sharing back and forth, wanting to see others succeed.”

Enthusiasm was evident. The first appointment on Friday was at 7:30 a.m. The first person arrived at 4:52 a.m., Walter said.

That was the case a week later when the action then shifted to the Carolina Panthers’ home field at Bank of America Stadium, where Atrium and Honeywell held drive-through and walk-up vaccinations. The first person arrived at 6:30 a.m. for an 8

a.m. appointment, according to Honeywell Supply Chain Officer Torsten Pilz.

“Some people were anxious and couldn’t wait,” he said. “I saw many people leaving this area with tears in their eyes. They had hope.”

“This is exactly the kind of way that Bank of America Stadium should be used — for the benefit of our community,” said Glick, president of Panthers owner Tepper Sports & Entertainment, at a news conference after the clinic opened.

Asked by VenuesNow what advice he would give to other venues looking to conduct vaccination clinics, Glick said thorough planning and an examination of how things went at the speedway made for a smooth process at Bank of America Stadium.

“I think this has been really well thought out and everybody has been alive to giving a great level of service but also looking at things we can do to improve,” he said. “I guess what I would say to other stadiums and venues is, we would definitely encourage you to do it. It’s a great public service. It’s a great way for our venues to be used. It is different. I spoke to a member of our guest relations

team who has been integral in working with this collective group to pull this off and she said to me, this has been like preparing for three Panthers NFL games. We’ve had to reinvent so many things. This fall we reinvented how fans could come to a Panthers game during a pandemic or how they could come to the (Atlantic Coast Conference) championship game. We were able to use some of those lessons but today we’ve done something differently for the very first time. My advice to my colleagues at other venues (is) be open minded, put yourself under pressure, learn a new way to do things and do it with great partners like we have in this effort.”

The combination of Honeywell providing technology, Atrium handling the medical aspects and the speedway with its event expertise was the kind of winning formula that Walter expects to be repeated elsewhere.

Those coming to the facility got to drive right onto the track and eventually into the track’s NASCAR Cup garage to receive their shots. In total, it took about 45 minutes to go through the process, including an up to 30-minute post-shot observation period, Walter said.

One family whose car broke down at the track was even given a ride home, he said.

“Our company culture is to serve others,” Walter said. “When you put others ahead of yourself, your business plan will always be successful.”

Across the country in eastern Washington, Spokane Arena opened as a testing site in January, according to Matt Meyer, the director of entertainment at the arena and the First Interstate Center for the Arts.

Meyer said he had already been working with Community Health Association of Spokane on a plan to administer 80 shots of the Moderna vaccine a day when Washington Gov. Jay Inslee announced that the arena would be a mass vaccination site.

The facility was positioned to administer 500 vaccinations per day, with a goal of handling 5,000 people a day by March, with the process expected to last through May, Meyer said.

“For the most part, it’s going to be dependent on the allocations of the vaccine and how many we’re going to be getting on a weekly basis,” he said.

Along with CHAS, the arena has been doing drive-up testing since the beginning of December, Meyer said. People are being brought inside the arena for the inoculations, given weather and the ability to handle more daily visits than would be possible on a drive-through basis.

Meyer said he has been on calls with colleagues, “hearing what other venues are doing, how it’s working.”

“I took a lot of that information, a lot of diagrams and put it in front of everybody and we decided to pull it indoors,” he said.

So that no vaccine goes unused, the venue has initiated a standby list, he said.

“What’s been great about this whole process is you’ve got the Department of Health, you’ve got (the) Spokane Regional Health District, CHAS and then the arena, all these different staffs, we’re all working together in

unison and then you throw in the National Guard as well,” Meyer said. “After multiple conversations and conversations I’ve had with venues throughout the nation, I’ve pretty much told (the arena’s partners), you’ve got to rely on us to handle the flow and the logistics of what’s going on, we need to rely on you guys to handle the medical aspect of it and getting the shots in arms and everything that’s associated with that, so what we’ve done on the venue side is we’ve taken all the printing, all the ancillary items that are popping up, we’ve been taking control of that and handling all the logistics for that.”

He said the vaccination package each person gets is as many as 10 pages long and there are also consent forms.

“I’ve got my event managers managing that, managing the standby list, the equipment list of items we’re pulling from the convention center and theater since we own and operate those and by doing that it’s opened things up where their focus is strictly on getting people through as quickly as possible and so far, it’s working quite efficiently,” Meyer said.

The arena received some compensation from the state, and the testing and vaccination efforts have allowed some staff to return

to work, he said. The arena has also served as a smoke shelter when wildfires ravaged the Pacific Northwest late last summer and into fall, and as a shelter for homeless individuals between May and August.

Two of the largest venue vaccination sites were at Dodger Stadium, which has also served as a testing location and a polling place, and Petco Park, home of the MLB Padres, in San Diego. Smaller venues, like Roy Wilkins Auditorium at Saint Paul (Minnesota) RiverCentre, where area educators were vaccinated, are also part of the effort.

Anti-vaccination protesters who blocked and misdirected traffic outside of Dodger Stadium shut down the city-run clinic in the stadium parking lots for about an hour on a recent Saturday and winter weather forced a postponement on the second day of a mid-February vaccination clinic run by Centura Health at Broadmoor World Arena in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

At Cal Expo, the California state fairgrounds in Sacramento, two vaccination efforts, one administered by health care group Kaiser Permanente and the other by the county health department, are inoculating 700 people per day. The goal is for each to ramp up to about 2,500 jabs a day, depending

on the availability of shots, according to Tom Martinez, chief deputy general manager of the California Exposition & State Fair.

Sacramento County was administering the Moderna vaccine in the fairgrounds’ pavilion, which houses animals during the annual summer fair run, while Kaiser was administering the Pfizer vaccine and expecting shipments from Moderna as well, Martinez said. Kaiser is set up in the facility’s Expo Center building, where various arts and crafts exhibits and entertainment are offered during the fair, he said.

In addition, the 800-acre, mile-wide facility is housing homeless individuals who’ve tested positive and others considered susceptible in 63 FEMA-supplied trailers, while also continuing to administer COVID-19 tests. The trailers are spread out and those who’ve tested positive are isolated from others, Martinez said.

Kaiser administers vaccines seven days a week, while the county is on hand on weekdays. The testing facility also runs Monday through Friday, but for 12 hours each day, Martinez said.

“They say when life gives you lemons, make lemonade and Cal Expo is striving to make the best lemonade possible and meet the enormity of this moment,” he said. ▀



SHOT TALK: California Gov. Gavin Newsom (center) discusses Cal Expo's drive-through vaccination program with other state officials.

INTERNATIONAL BEAT

A look at events making news around the world

BY GIDEON GOTTFRIED

ENGLAND

A VENUE FOR THE COVID AGE?
The Vertical Theatre Group talking to financial partners

The Vertical Theatre Group, founded in August, is talking to potential financial partners about a design it has produced for a new venue that could host live performances with social distancing restrictions while still turning a profit.

The group features producers, creatives and technical specialists working with the team of London-based Stufish Entertainment Architects.

The structure is planned to be tourable and free-standing. It has a roof to protect the audience and stage from the elements but open sides to allow for optimum airflow

and natural ventilation, a key factor with regards to the spread of COVID-19. The audience sits in balconies that can accommodate groups between four and 12 people, or designated “social bubbles.”

The Vertical Theatre is modular and has a capacity of 1,200 to 2,400 people, depending on the distancing rules in place.

SOUTH KOREA

‘WICKED’ DEFIES GRAVITY
Run of 25 performances in Seoul sells out immediately

With the relaxation of social distancing rules in Seoul, stage musicals have returned with a vengeance. Twenty-five performances of “Wicked,” from Feb.

12 to March 5 at the Blue Square, sold out immediately, according to The Korea Herald. In fact, demand for VIP seats was so great that the tickets, which normally cost 150,000 won (\$134), were going for 400,000 won on illegal secondary ticket sites.

It should be noted that while distancing rules were eased, theaters are still allowed to sell seats only up to 50 percent of their capacity.

The situation became so intense that the star of the show, Ock Ju-hyun, went on social media and asked the public to “please allow only those who really love the show to attend.” The entire run will finish up May 1.

Tickets for 14 of the 18 performances of “Man of La Mancha,” starring superstar actor Cho Seung-woo, also sold out immediately after being postponed three times. The musical will run through March 1 at the Charlotte Theater in eastern Seoul.

In addition, the musical “Monte Cristo” extended its run for three weeks until March 28. The show opened in November but was paused for two months because of stricter social distancing rules.

“The Last Empress” also extended its run after being postponed three times.

AUSTRALIA

EVENT GENIUS SIGNS THREE FESTIVALS
Lost Paradise, Wildlands and For the Love on board with platform

U.K.-based Festicket, which entered Australia in 2018, is expanding there via its Event Genius platform, which it bought in 2019 along with Ticket Arena.

Event Genius in early February announced its first deals Down Under with three festivals — Lost Paradise, Wildlands and For the Love — offering “end-to-end ticketing, cashless, and event management.”

Lost Paradise will return to Glenworth Valley outside Sydney Dec. 28-Jan. 1. Normally drawing 10,000 patrons, it canceled in 2019 because of raging bushfires and in 2020 as a result of coronavirus.

Melbourne collective Untitled Group’s Wildlands sold out its March 6-7 dates at the 25,000-capacity Brisbane Showground.

For the Love — Untitled Group’s music, lifestyle and ocean festival — which in the past staged in Bali and California, stages this year at McCallum Park Perth on March 13, the sold-out Birrarung Marr Melbourne on April 3 and Doug Jennings Park on the Gold Coast on April 17. ▣

Christie Eliezer and Philip Brasor contributed to this report.

GO WITH THE FLOW: Open sides allow for better airflow in The Vertical Theatre Group’s creation.



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Laurie Jacoby's New Adventure

Barclays Center EVP on her new gig, the ultimate '70s concert and the aura of this year's Brooklyn Nets

BY ANDY GENSLE



NYC FIXTURE: Laurie Jacoby is joining Barclays after 22 years of working for Madison Square Garden.

EARLIER THIS MONTH, Laurie Jacoby was named executive vice president and chief entertainment officer of Brooklyn's Barclays Center, where she will oversee programming and marketing, including the booking of concerts. No stranger to the highly competitive New York market, Jacoby worked for 22 years for the market leader, Madison Square Garden, where she won three Pollstar Venue Executive of the Year awards. Here, she discusses the new gig, the ultimate 1970s concert, what having a championship team does to a venue and, of course, seeing "The Beard."

Congratulations on the new job.

Thank you. I'm over the moon. It's awesome. It's just so funny how life is. I always say the only constant in this world is change, so you have to ride it and here I am.

It wasn't a lot of time between jobs in the scheme of things.

I needed some time to figure out what I wanted to do especially during

COVID and cooped in a small space. You just feel out of sorts, so I really needed to take some time and figure out what the next big move was. And John Abbamondi (CEO of Barclays Center and the NBA Nets) in Brooklyn came forward early, and that planted the seed very early on.

What's it like with a new CEO? Are you rethinking everything?

It's fresh energy because almost the entire executive leadership team are pretty much brand-new hires. There's a few who were part of the organization or part of the company with Joe Tsai, but it's so exciting because there are so many who are part of the executive leadership team who are coming in on the same footing and we all have great ideas. John's put together a great group of people. I felt there was a kinship and it was really important for me that the culture of the workplace be one that I felt aligned with.

Are you in touch with your predecessor, Keith Sheldon?

He actually just sent me a text yes-

terday. He reached out to me when he was leaving and heard about my situation. He was one of the first people to reach out. We haven't spoken since I've accepted the position, we've just been texting. I don't officially start until March 1, but it's great to have that resource and a good relationship with somebody like that.

So you are one of the most beloved executives in our industry. I know because I saw the standing ovations at the Pollstar Awards when you won (three!) Venue Executive of the Year Awards. But this is a tough business with lots of hard-nosed negotiations and egos — why all the love?

I have never worn my title on my sleeve. I am, first and foremost, a music fan, that really knew from the very first concert that I ever went to that this is what I wanted to do.

What was that concert?

I'm going to date myself here: It was Loggins and Messina, Steely Dan and the Doobie Brothers.

Is there a more '70s lineup than that?

I grew up in Long Island. It was at the Nassau Coliseum, and I was in the nosebleeds, the very, very last row — I'm talking can't get any higher in the building — but I felt the magic. I was like, "Oh, my God. I want to do that." This is corny, but I still get excited when the trucks roll in. I'm like, "Oh, my God, I'm part of the team. I get to do what I want to do." Not everybody gets to have that dream realized. I'm a fan first and I have enthusiasm for every job I do.

In the live business, it's easy to get into difficult situations without great partners or communication between artist, agent, manager and the building and yet, you've somehow come out smelling like roses, at least according to the standing ovations at the Pollstar Awards.

I like to talk, I'm a good talker, I have no fear. I talk to people who are disgruntled and unhappy. They could walk in the building that way, and my

job is to turn it around and make sure when they leave they have a smile on their face. I always see it as I am hosting the biggest party for them and whatever they need, how can we help you? Life is unpredictable. A truck may show up late, it might have a weather delay. I've dealt with power outages. I've dealt with two parts of a tour that are not getting along. I have dealt with almost everything. The thing I come away from it with is that if you can talk to people and they know that you care, and that you are listening, and you're trying to find a solution, that goes a long way. That's what I try to do.

I think that's pretty normal for this business, but you're talking about Madison Square Garden, for 22 years and the amount of shows they do and tickets they sell. They're always on the top of our arena chart every year and with the caliber of guests, fans and sponsors, there may be no more pressurized place to work.

I feel if I can do that, I can do almost anything. It actually empowers me, because I have no fear. I also don't mind making a call and introducing myself to somebody I don't know, and letting them know, "I'm around. How can I help you?" I've befriended a lot of people. I'm not going to name names, but I've had to deal with some people that were not the most pleasant, and then by the end of the night, they're giving me a hug. You're not going to win every person over, but by and large, I've been able to make them feel comfortable. People are intimidated by playing in the New York City market. If it's their first time playing an arena in the market, they already have a set of nerves before they walk in the door. How's the show going to go? Are they going to get a good review? Is the sponsor going to be happy? Is the band going to be happy? Is the catering good — it's all about the food. I take all that into consideration and I try to diffuse situations before they flare up. And it has nothing to do with the venue. It's just life on the road. There's also managing all of the people that come and hang out, because usually it's not the artist. It's the manager, the tour manager, the record label, everybody has a stake in it. And it's just trying to make them all feel welcome and make them feel like they're a part of it and build those relationships to the point where they know the next time



they see me, they're going to be taken care of and that I'm not going to drop the ball. I understand the pressure they're under. I've had many people tell me I helped alleviate a lot of their worries when they walked in and realized, "Oh, my God. It's fine. It's chill, we're going to be good."

When you were at the Garden, how did you view Barclays?

New York is a very competitive marketplace, and so a lot of times I was a little limited with avails, so sometimes it was just purely a matter of dates being available. But look, they were competition. No doubt about it. When they opened, and every new venue has a honeymoon phase, the Garden transformation was still occurring at that time, so we didn't have the full slate of avails. I think everybody has to do the best that they can for the venue they work at. I'm friends with everyone in every single venue. I know every person that's in our market looking at venues.

It's interesting how Barclays seemingly organically became a town square of sorts for Brooklyn when there's a protest or celebration, which it wasn't at all before it was built.

Obviously in front of Barclays, and Barclays Plaza, is a natural space to gather. The Garden has no place to gather. You have the sidewalk and then you have the street, so there's not that natural place where all roads and literally all subways lead there. This summer, it became this area where people felt safe and they could speak their mind and it really became the place to be. And also, it was where people got information from. Just from watching

it, I wasn't living anywhere near there, it was like, "OK, updates are happening here. People are meeting there. Change is happening." I just remember every day when, unfortunately, while all those incidents were happening, that nothing was happening inside the venue. There was a lot happening outside the venue.

Do you think you'll program in a way with that in mind? Are there opportunities for the town square?

There's ways to enhance it. I'm not on the job yet. I have lots of ideas. But I think there's ways to enhance it and to encourage it and to tie it into events that are happening inside the venue as well. There's great opportunity there.

You've worked in a building where sports franchises have achieved greatness and it looks like these Brooklyn Nets are on their way. What does it do to a building when you have a championship team in terms of programming?

First of all, the vibe of the building, it definitely helps and enhances it. I have people reaching out to me, and I know what they want right now, they want to come to a Nets game and I'm not even there. I have people who are like, "Oh, hey, congratulations. Oh, wow, you're in Brooklyn." I know exactly what they want. So it's exciting to be at a building that has that vibe and that has a team that has the potential of the Nets because it only adds to the allure of the venue.

Have you seen James Harden's beard?

Yeah, of course, but I don't think we can get too close right now with the COVID protocols. 🍷

THE TOWN SQUARE: Protesters gather May 29 outside Barclays Center to demonstrate against police brutality in the wake of George Floyd's death while in police custody in Minneapolis.

MANAGEMENT

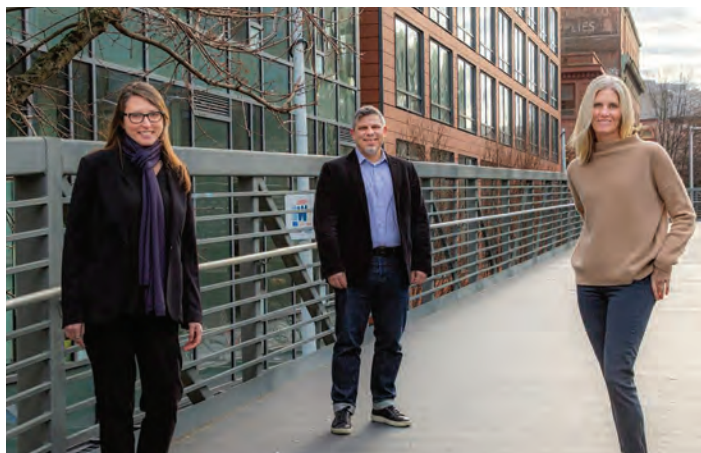
Elevate Sports Ventures named **ALEXA FUENTES** head of sales at Circuit of the Americas. Fuentes was manager of brand alliances for Major League Soccer. The racetrack hired Elevate to support ticketing and premium hospitality sales, strategy and service.

VenuWorks hired **QUINCY KECK** as the general manager of The Yard in Johnston, Iowa. The central green space, scheduled to open this summer, will feature regular event programming including concerts, a splash pad, and a seasonal ice-skating rink. Keck was the in-house Ungerboeck Event Trainer at the VenuWorks corporate office.

San Francisco-based check-out-free technology company Zippin hired **GARY JACOBUS** as senior vice president of business development. Jacobus most recently was with SSP America, which operates the food and beverage concessions at airports and other travel locations, and is formerly of Aramark's Sports and Entertainment division.

Event technology software company Ungerboeck hired **CASEY JESSMON** as chief information security officer. Jessmon was business information security officer at Equifax Workforce Solutions before joining Ungerboeck, which is based in the St. Louis suburb of O'Fallon, Missouri.

Performing arts and media facilities planning and design firm LMN Architects added **JULIE ADAMS, OSAMA QUOTAH** and **PAMELA TREVITHICK** as partners.



LMN'S JULIE ADAMS, OSAMA QUOTAH AND PAMELA TREVITHICK

Architectural lighting and design firm Auerbach Pollock Friedlander promoted **BARBARA J. WOHLSEN** to associate.



BARBARA J. WOHLSEN

Hornets Sports & Entertainment, which owns the NBA's Charlotte Hornets and operates Spectrum Center, named **TAMARA DANIELS** senior vice president and general counsel. Daniels was vice president and general counsel of the NHL's Vegas Golden Knights and its other properties: the Henderson Silver Knights, Henderson Event Center, Lifeguard Arena and City National Arena.

Nashville-based promoter Outback Presents hired **AMY HELBERG** as director of Atlanta operations. Helberg was vice president of booking for Live Nation in Atlanta.



AMY HELBERG

Loudspeaker manufacturer Renkus-Heinz named **DUDLEY MCLAUGHLIN** national sales manager and **GARRISON PARKIN** Western regional sales manager.

Visit Plano in Plano, Texas, named **STEVE YEARWOOD** association and SMERF (social, military, educational, religious and fraternal) sales manager and appointed **OLIVIA WOODWARD** to event services coordinator.



CHARLES R. CONNER III



REBECCA JONES

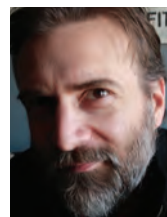
CHARLES R. CONNER III and **REBECCA JONES** were elected to the board of directors for the Maryland State Fair & Agricultural Society Inc.

JOHN HILL was named director of sales and marketing for the Cobb Galleria Centre and the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre. Hill was director of hotel sales for the Renaissance Atlanta Waverly Hotel and Convention Center.



JOHN HILL

Ticketing platform Lyte named **LAWRENCE PERYER** chief



LAWRENCE PERYER



WENDI STURGIS

strategy officer. Peryer was chief revenue officer. The company hired **WENDI STURGIS** as chief revenue officer and **NEAL GILBREATH** as director of sales. Sturgis was CEO at Yext Europe, and Gilbreath was vice president of sales and business development at Front Gate Tickets.

Patron Technology promoted **JIM BARCZAK** to senior vice president of revenue, **RACHEL BULLOCK** to senior vice president of operations, **DOUG LYONS** to senior vice president of product and marketing, and **MIKE CLOW** to senior vice president of engineering.

Oak View Group Facilities hired **MARC MULHERIN** as general manager at the Fort Smith (Arkansas) Convention Center and **MARK ARANCIBIA** as general manager at the Jackson (Mississippi) Convention Center Complex.

CHERRE MILLER will return to the Jackson Convention Center Complex as assistant general manager. For Moody Center in Austin, Texas, OVG Facilities named **TIM VOGT** vice president of arena operations, **MICHAEL OWENS** vice president of booking, **VERONICA CANTU** vice president of marketing and **ANSEL GARDINER** director of finance, and **RODNEY REESE** was named general manager of Legacy Sports Park in Mesa, Ariz. At the corporate level **PETER ZINGONI** was hired as senior vice president of development.



RODNEY REESE

Legends Wins Super Bowl With a Per Cap Record

Fans spent average of \$132 for food and drink, \$80 for merchandise in Tampa

BY DON MURET

Concessions

LEGENDS HOSPITALITY SMASHED the record for Super Bowl food and retail spending Feb. 7 at Super Bowl LV in Tampa, Florida, a function of factors such as concession stand lines shortened by restricted venue capacity during the pandemic.

The per cap was \$132 for food and drink, covering general concessions and premium dining, plus \$80 for merchandise. The numbers are for game day sales at Raymond James Stadium only, Legends officials said.

The previous Super Bowl record was \$95.41 for food and drink sales in 2017 at NRG Stadium in Houston, where Aramark runs concessions and catering. For retail, the old record was Super Bowl 50 at Levi's Stadium in 2016, where Legends posted a \$65 per cap.

In Tampa, the official game attendance was 24,835 in a stadium that seats 65,890. Doing the math, fans spent about \$3.28 million for food and drink and \$1.99 million on retail items.

"This was a Super Bowl like no other," said Dan Smith, president of Legends Hospitality. "The confluence of factors that went into the planning was just surreal."

"In my 45-year career, I don't remember having to put all of that into the mix and to come out with a plan and then on top of the plan have five to six contingency plans ready to activate at any given time."

Legends, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' food provider, never really knew how many fans would be in the stadium. The expected capacity was all over the map, Smith said. Regardless, virtually every point of sale was operating to provide quicker and more efficient service in a socially

distanced setup.

"The availability and menu selection is what drove the per cap up," Smith said. "You could pretty much walk up to any counter at will, get what you want and get back to your seat."

In addition, concessions pricing was at a premium as is typical for the Super Bowl. Souvenir sodas cost \$14 and domestic beers were \$13, but there were also "fan friendly" priced items such as \$5 hot dogs and nachos, a trend that started two years ago in Atlanta. High-end items for Super Bowl LV included the BBQ platter (\$22), smoked wings (\$20) and a double cheeseburger (\$18).

"Particularly at a Super Bowl, nobody is there to save money," consultant Chris Bigelow said.

The numbers sound right, considering suite catering runs \$400 to \$500 a person, said consultant Mike Plutino, founder and CEO of Food Service Matters. Those figures were the range at Hard Rock Stadium and Mercedes-Benz Stadium, site of the two previous Super Bowls, Plutino said.

Raymond James Stadium has 195 suites, and all were sold for the Super Bowl. There were fewer occupants in the suites because of



IT'S ALL GOODS, MAN: A merchandise vendor was feeling good about things at Super Bowl LV in Tampa, Florida.

GETTY IMAGES

social distance measures, said Peter O'Reilly, the NFL's executive vice president of club business and league events.

"There was likely a heavier concentration of premium dollars that propped up the per cap with less general concession fans," Plutino said. "They had the high-paying customers all over the place and were lighter in the bowl."

O'Reilly touched on Super Bowl per caps Feb. 10 during his annual postmortem on the event during the Stadium Managers Association virtual seminar. A crowd of less than 25,000 in the stadium resulted in shorter lines, which produced a better experience, O'Reilly said.

"The reality is, you've got a lot less — almost no — pregame hospitality," he said. ... "It was a later-arriving crowd than normal for the Super Bowl because a lot of people are (typically) inside the secure perimeter early enjoying hospitality."

Some experts thought the merchandise per cap should've been

higher considering that, for the first time in its 55-year history, the Super Bowl was held in the home venue for one of the competitors, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Others say the number was strong and pointed to what was most likely a less corporate crowd flying to Tampa to attend the game and take home Super Bowl souvenirs this year.

As part of its exclusive with the NFL to sell Super Bowl merchandise, Legends took over the team store, which is run by Fanatics for Bucs regular-season games. There were about 20 retail locations inside the stadium, including the main outlet, but with increased protocols in place, it wasn't the easiest space to access during the Super Bowl, Smith said. There were also some portable merchandise trailers outside of the venue.

The real story was that the NFL's vendors worked closely with Legends in-market and produced goods as they needed them on site. Typically, suppliers produce Super Bowl merchandise,

ship it and are done, Smith said.

"Demand for the product actually started early and we were limited in terms of setup facilities because the NFL Experience was limited," he said. "We had to follow all the safety protocols, so given the footprint that was established, I don't think we could have done 10 cents more. The sales velocity was unlike any Super Bowl I've been a part of."

In general, the higher spend on food and drink fell in line with a trend many NFL teams experienced during the regular season because of faster speed of service with stadiums filled to a fraction of capacity.

"We've always said the average customer has \$20 more to spend if we can move the lines faster," Plutino said.

The move to cashless concessions and an increased focus on mobile ordering also expedited service as teams eliminate cash transactions as a safety measure. Super Bowl LV was part

of the shift at Raymond James Stadium, with reverse ATM machines installed for fans to convert cash to a debit card to use at concession stands.

"It was smooth," O'Reilly said. "There's no going back on all-mobile Super Bowls. We checked with our team on the concessions side and there were really no issues. We messaged it pretty hard on the lead-up. Give credit to Visa, which is one of our partners and on the cutting edge on this and has helped a lot of buildings do it effectively."

For Legends now, it's wait until next year. The vendor runs both the food and retail at SoFi Stadium, the new \$5 billion palace in Inglewood, California, that will play host to Super Bowl LVI.

"It's in L.A., one of the most fan-friendly, nicest stadiums yet to open to fans," Smith said. "We've already started the planning for that one and given the (large) footprint we'll have there, hopefully, we'll be through this pandemic. That one will be the pinnacle of Super Bowls." ▀



BIG GAME SEAFOOD SPREAD: Ice sculpture and appetizers in a premium area at Raymond James Stadium.

COURTESY LEGENDS

Live music veterans
team up to build and
open suburban venue

BY ERIC RENNER BROWN

Factory Fresh: New Club Going Up Near St. Louis

COURTESY VENUE

Clubs

DURING THE CORONAVIRUS pandemic, seemingly every day has brought news of another venue closure. For that reason alone, the existence of The Factory is a breath of fresh air – a state-of-the-art new club, built from the ground up and set to open as soon as it's safe.

Situated in Chesterfield, Missouri, a suburb 20 minutes west of St. Louis, The Factory will serve as the high-end centerpiece of The District at Chesterfield, a 372,000-square-foot mixed-use development that's already home to a Main Event entertainment center, a Topgolf and a Residence Inn, and will soon host several other dining, shopping and entertainment attractions.

It's not something the venue's talent buyer, Dan Merker, who was born and raised in St. Louis, would've seen coming as a teenager going to shows at the likes of The Pageant and Mississippi Nights in the late '90s.

"When I was growing up, this area where (The Factory) is was not developed," Merker said. "West of where I grew up was basically farmland, and that goes all the way back to 2000. ... If anybody really wanted any entertainment, they had to drive 20 to 30 minutes to go downtown to see it."

Enter Michael Staenberg, who has developed more than 200 shopping centers and who, through The Staenberg Group, bought the land several years ago where The District now sits.

"With the population of Chesterfield and the surrounding area of the county just continuing to grow, Michael saw an opportunity with some real estate that he had purchased to really build out an entertainment district," Merker said.

The digs might be new, but the brains behind The Factory are as seasoned as they come. Early on, Staenberg turned to his friend Steve Schankman — who defined the St. Louis market and others regionally through Contemporary Productions, which he co-founded in 1968 — to help develop the idea for the venue, which will be able to hold anywhere from 900 for seated shows to 3,000 at full capacity.

"When you go buy a venue, you have the hurdle of 'Hey, what can we fix? What's it gonna cost?' because you're dealing with an existing structure," Merker said. "Since this was built, really, from the ground up, all of that was thought of in advance. ... Usually, you pick these things apart and you find things that are wrong with it. I haven't found anything wrong with this one."

Merker arrives at The Factory after stints at Huka Entertainment, where he worked on Gulf

Merker, excitedly sharing some of his favorite aspects. "The acoustics are phenomenal. Once you walk in the venue, you're in a grand lobby and these giant windows go up two stories. So you have a natural sunlight coming into the venue, this big industrial vibe."

Concessions and lavatories have elegant designs, the backstage amenities are top-flight, and The Factory's sightlines are "unreal." And, importantly, its trucking docks and production capabilities will be able to accommodate many large shows that play arenas.

In terms of booking, expect a little bit of everything — except for touring Broadway, given the regional clout of venues such as the Fox and the Muny.

"Our programming will be a lot different than something like the Pageant," Merker said. "I'll program it a lot more like an active PAC. We'll be doing kids shows, we'll be doing some adult contemporary. With our location, we'll do



SIGHT LINE: A view from the stage at The Factory, which should be completed by the end of March.

Coast festivals including Hangout, Tortuga and BUKU New Orleans, and Outback Presents, where he spent the three years preceding the pandemic as vice president of touring. When friend and Partisan Arts agent Hank Sacks connected him with Brian Carp, The Factory's chief operating officer, Merker jumped at the opportunity to book a room on his home turf. (Carp has a similarly sterling resume, having logged time with the Fox and Boulder theaters in Boulder, Colo., with Z2 Entertainment, and as general manager of House of Blues locations in Dallas and Anaheim, California.)

"The detail that has gone into this venue is incredible," said

a lot of country ... we're surrounded by the country crowd."

The Factory broke ground in February 2020 and construction is on pace to be completed by the end of March. Merker's uncertain when exactly it will open and noted that markets such as Chicago and Kansas City will need to come back online for St. Louis to become a touring reality for many acts.

But when it does, the St. Louis area will have another high-end venue at its disposal, with programming curated by one of its own.

"I've always wanted a venue to call home in St. Louis. There just weren't the right opportunities," Merker said. "Then this one came." ▣



THE NEW LOOK OF

THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC has added new layers to the challenge of securing venues and events, but it's not the only concern keeping industry professionals up at night as more traditional threats remain and bad actors have adapted tactics to the degree that even low-tech, lone-wolf attacks can achieve deadly and economically devastating results.

Nearly a dozen sources interviewed by VenuesNow regarding trends in event security as the pandemic stretches into a second year agree that measures and technologies aimed at removing as much friction as possible from the guest experience without sacrificing security have accelerated in recent months thanks to their utility in the age of COVID-19.

At the same time, some experts warn that attacks such as the 2017 suicide bombing following an Ariana Grande concert at Manchester Arena point to the need for closer scrutiny of perimeter security, for instance.

New actors with different causes, some included under the umbrella of domestic terrorism, have also emerged.

"What we have seen is that these bad actors have figured out they don't need to fly a commercial aircraft or figure out ways to skirt screening at an airport. They can do things that are a lot more direct, a lot easier," says Akmal Ali, founder and CEO of Aluma, a Washington, D.C.-based risk management and security advisory firm that specializes in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's

Safety Act program.

Ali points to attacks involving knives, a lone gunman and one person driving a large vehicle as high-impact events that are "unsophisticated, low-cost and a lot harder to manage, but just as deadly."

A serious issue with which all venues must come to grips is queue security and post-event clustering, as was the issue in Manchester, according to Dan Donovan, founder and managing partner of security firm Stratoscope, which was hired by Manchester Arena to help harden security following the attack, and consults with many big league facilities in North America.

In addition, health and safety measures like social distancing and timed entry dovetail



VIGILANCE

COVID-19 AND THE CHANGING NATURE OF TRADITIONAL THREATS ARE KEEPING SECURITY PROS AND VENUES BUSY

BY JAMES ZOLTAK

with the need to secure queues, said Robert Reddick, vice president in charge of technology at Show Pros Entertainment Services Inc.

The attack on the U.S. Capitol indicates emerging threats from domestic actors and flash mobs, Ali said.

“January 6 points out that it’s not going to be your traditional bad actor anymore either,” said Ali, whose first client after leaving the DHS was the New York Yankees, whose stadium received Safety Act certification. “The stereotypes you see on shows like ‘24’ and ‘Homeland,’ it’s not like that anymore. DHS has spent a lot of energy in the last three to four months talking about white supremacy and domestic violent extremists as the No. 1

threat to the nation.”

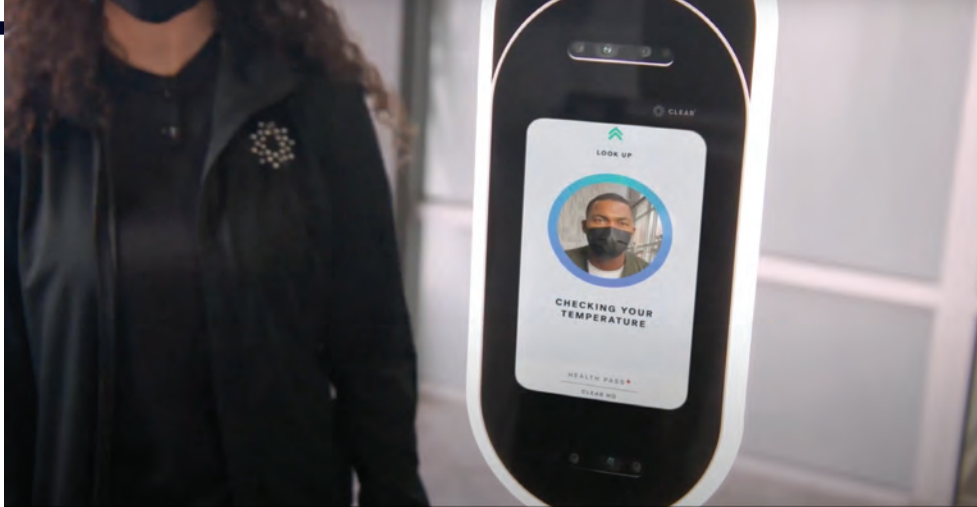
The Safety Act, enacted in 2002 and administered by DHS, gives venues and others legal liability protection provided they employ anti-terrorism measures and/or technologies. The goal is to encourage deployment of anti-terrorism measures and products by offering conditional protection from what could be crippling legal liability. About 30 major league venues have been Safety Act approved, most in the NFL and MLB, Ali said.

Not everyone thinks the domestic terrorism threat is any more serious than the kind of social unrest and sometimes violent actions that were evident in some U.S. cities over the summer such as Seattle, Portland, Minneapo-

lis-St. Paul and Charlotte, among others.

“What happened in D.C. is of little consequence, especially compared to the riots, burning, looting, and killing, under the umbrella of protests nationwide over the last year, but does highlight the need to be vigilant and prepared,” said Damon Zumwalt, president and CEO of Contemporary Services Corp.

“We’re charged with the responsibility to cooperate with clients in orchestrating proper procedures and safety measures for the participants and patrons on a daily basis,” Zumwalt said. “There is no room for a breach in attention to detail, preparation and implementation of these measures on a consistent basis. We have worked with law enforcement agencies



HANDHELD HEALTH DATA: Clear has added a digital Health Pass to its platform.

of incidents, he said.

There's a comprehensive exam at the conclusion of each year and certificates are bestowed upon completion of the academy.

An online version of the academy is being formulated, Herrera said. He said in the current environment, with everyone so focused on the health aspects of reopening venues, there's a danger in losing sight of security threats.

NEW LESSONS FOR THE NEW NORMAL

Zumwalt said health and welfare protocols require additional training of crowd management personnel to monitor evidence of a vaccine, orchestrate a temperature check and provide on-site COVID testing, to ensure as safe an environment as possible.

"We'll be ready to assume additional responsibilities depending on the directives of our clients, which could incorporate monitoring health status, masking and distancing when required," he said. "I trust that with all the entities working on solutions, we will have the ability to fill venues later this year."

Larry Perkins, president and CEO of Perkins Crowd Management Group and assistant general manager at PNC Arena in Raleigh, North Carolina, says all security protocols implemented before COVID-19 struck must be incorporated as part of reopening strategies for dealing with the pandemic.

"Threats still exist and we must not forget to include these measures in our COVID-19 plans," he said. "These security elements are layers needed in today's environment. Even so, we still try to balance effective safety and security with customer services. A blend of elements are needed to give the appearance of easy, unintrusive security measures," he said.

Jeff Spoerndle, vice president with event staffing and security outfit WESS, which services venues across the county, said health and safety protocol enforcement are duties that will be added to front line staff responsibilities and "it's crucial to train staff to be vigilant."

"There are a lot of different things going on in the world that we have to take into account," he said. "We must have multiple layers to respond to those threats. The threat level is increasing, whether it's international, domestic, protests, other factors. It's critical that our staff is vigilant. These are serious threats and large venues are targets."

The question remains: Are venues

"Safety Act participation has been a major factor, especially in the sports world. Professional sports leagues have taken on the challenge and have put a lot of sweat equity into it. I would not consider them soft targets any longer."

— Akmal Ali



"There is no room for a breach in attention to detail, preparation and implementation of these measures on a consistent basis. We have worked with law enforcement agencies over the years, but the changing world has demonstrated a greater demand for additional collaboration."

— Damon Zumwalt



"From guest services, with all the training we've been pushing out, along with messaging that takes the guesswork out (of what's expected of customers), the entire landscape from a health, safety and security standpoint is going to be different, but they are going to get the best in guest service and experience."

— Mark Herrera



over the years, but the changing world has demonstrated a greater demand for additional collaboration."

Donovan says professional sports leagues have prepared for many potential threats, including protesters bent on disruption and violence, and have developed uniform security standards. On the collegiate level, more work needs to be done, as some colleges and universities have followed the lead of major leagues, while many others have not, he said.

Monitoring social media is one way that law enforcement and security professionals identify potential mob threats, Ali, Donovan and others said, and while intelligence was plentiful prior to the Capitol riots, preparation was not up to snuff.

SCHOOL FOR THOUGHT

Post-9/11, the International Association of Venue Managers offers a two-year course called the Academy for Venue Safety and Security.

The AVSS, which has been adapted to reflect the most current challenges, including the pandemic, focuses on assumptive risk analysis and incorporating it in incident response plans and emergency action plans, said Mark Herrera, who oversees the program for IAVM as the trade organization's director of education and life safety.

"We want to ensure all venues' incident response plans reflect the altered operating conditions stemming from the current health environment," Herrera said, noting that the AVSS includes at least one exercise at a member facility in which building employees as well as academy attendees participate.

Herrera said IAVM works with law enforcement and other government agencies to keep members abreast of trends and tools, adding that securing a venue ideally involves close cooperation with such entities.

Attendees are taught to identify behavioral patterns that indicate a possible threat and to use a guest services approach as an initial response to suspicious individuals. The gist of the academy is to teach participants to prepare, plan, respond and recover in the face any number

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rising to the newest security challenges?

"Absolutely," Ali said. "Safety Act participation has been a major factor, especially in the sports world. Professional sports leagues have taken on the challenge and have put a lot of sweat equity into it. I would not consider them soft targets any longer."

Herrera says that fans returning to events are and will be seeing evident changes.

"From guest services, with all the training we've been pushing out, along with messaging that takes the guesswork out (of what's expected of customers), the entire landscape from a health, safety and security standpoint is going to be different, but they are going to get the best in guest service and experience."

A key to successful reopening, Herrera said, will be getting the word out to the event-going public in advance so they understand what venues are doing and what's expected of guests.

Security personnel tasked with enforcing protocols like mask wearing and distancing will have to strike a balance between making sure rules are followed while not escalating interactions to the point of confrontation.

Consultant Bill Squires, former manager of old Giants Stadium and Cleveland Browns Stadium, now FirstEnergy Stadium, said fans not in compliance should be given a chance to "mask up" and properly distance themselves. Everyone must get on board while the pandemic continues and ultimately removing the offender may well be the only recourse, Squires said.

Social distancing and mask wearing are likely to remain even after the pandemic fades, he said.

Squires is a COVID survivor who works the Super Bowl annually for S.A.F.E. Management, the NFL's security provider for the event. Squires worked the event level at Raymond James Stadium for this year's game in Tampa. He said distancing and mask wearing was uniformly evident among stadium employees working the event.

"I've been in this industry for 34 years, since 1987, and I've been asked if I will go back to sports venues after what I experienced with my battle with COVID," Squires said. "Would I go back with my family? Absolutely, because I know my peers are going to take every precaution and make sure it's a safe environment. But when I go back, I will be wearing a face covering." ▀

RIISING TO THE TOP

How to figure out which security tech to use? Ask questions and see it in action, experts say

BY JAMES ZOLTAK

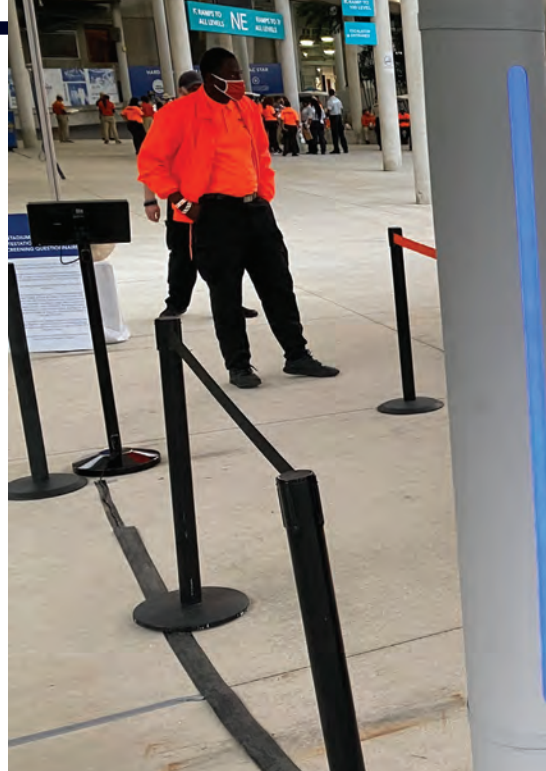
THERE'S BEEN A rush of products and services aimed at addressing venue security, health and safety in the age of COVID-19. The devices present challenges for venue managers that must separate the wheat of effective technology from the chaff of snake oil solutions that are untested and unlikely to perform as advertised, say experts in the field.

"It's one thing to have a technology founder or developer come and tell you, 'I've got this great technology. We think it's going to work well for this industry.' It's another thing to have a third party really put it through its paces in an operational sense and ensure that we understand how to apply that technology to this industry," said security consultant Dan Donovan, founder and managing partner of Stratoscope.

"Go see the product in action, talk to other venues that have purchased and installed the equipment you're interested in. They will tell you the good, the bad and the ugly," said Larry Perkins, president and CEO of Perkins Crowd Management Group and assistant general manager at PNC Arena in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Perkins said it's also wise to approach new technology pitches with specific questions geared toward individual facilities.

"You might have additional protocols that will be implemented at your venue that are not a part of the system in use at theirs," he said. "Understand the licensing process.



For example, you just don't plug in an X-ray machine and start operating. No. State and local environmental radiation agencies require licensing, operating certifications and inspections and if you move the X-ray to another venue, it has to be approved. Do you have the space to fit an X-ray machine? Is it heated and waterproof? Understand all aspects before leaping in."

Damon Zumwalt, president and CEO of Contemporary Services Corp., says vetting new technology is crucial and requires patience "to study, compare products and get advice from real experts, and also recommendations from those that have experience with the products or companies involved with them."

"It's often the habit to relegate purchasing to a department which doesn't have operational experience and solely relies on a paper proposal without fact checking," he said. "This is a dangerous proposition. The implementation of staffing and safety measures are just too important not to have greater consideration."

Contactless screening solutions, notably the Evolv Express units from Evolv Technology that were used at the College Football Playoff at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida, are gaining a foothold at venues where friction-free guest experiences that boost safety and security are the order of the day, says Donovan. The walk-through metal detector has greater throughput and is paired with artificial intelligence software to hone the device's accuracy, reducing false-positives to less than a third of traditional magnetometers.

Stratoscope has a deal with Evolv to lease the contactless systems to arenas and stadiums.

"We've got to maintain our security posture and still be able to get guests in in a touchless, frictionless process and that's where some new technologies have come to



light that are really assisting a number of venues,” Donovan said. “Evolv has come out with a metal detection device where the guests are not having to empty their pockets. We’re only going to see more products like that come to the marketplace.”

Another technology gaining traction is the Clear ticketing solution that uses biometrics such as fingerprint and retinal scans to identify and admit venue guests. Clear recently raised \$100 million in a funding round that included 32 Equity, the investment arm of the NFL.

“If you can integrate an Evolv unit with the Clear platform, there’s no need to touch anyone,” said Akmal Ali, founder and CEO of Aluma, a Washington, D.C.-based risk management and security advisory firm that specializes in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Safety Act program.

The International Association of Venue Managers, through its Academy for Venue Safety and Security, informs attendees about properly vetted technology that works in facilities.

“What you’re basically doing is adding layers to reduce levels of severity and of the risk,” said Mark Herrera, IAVM’s director of education and life safety. “If technology is a part of it that’s a win.”

Drones are other high-tech tools used to secure sports and entertainment venues, especially on the perimeters.

Stratoscope works with a company called Unified Command that deploys tethered drones, among other technologies, to add a layer of security at events.

One company, D-Fend Solutions, based in Israel with a U.S. unit in Washington, D.C., has been in business since 2017. It touts its cyber radio frequency system technology to identify if an aircraft is friend or foe, and can take control of the drone and safely land it.

Zumwalt says drones can be used to boost security efforts.

“There are drones that cost \$200 and drones

that cost \$20 million that can be used in a variety of ways,” he said. “There is presently an effort to load a drone with a highly accurate nuclear detection and analysis system to detect clandestine materials and explosives from a large standoff distance which could enhance the safety of the perimeter of venues and parking lots,” he said. “Drone science is ever-evolving, and parallel to that is the science for drone detection for preventative safety measures.”

Radio communications are another key aspect of venue security and Motorola Solutions has rolled out a smart radio called the Mototrbo Ion. It’s kind of a walkie-talkie on steroids, combining the assets of a smartphone, including wireless accessibility, with a push-to-talk two-way radio.

The company completed an 18-month development at the end of 2020 and is touting the Ion as a valuable tool for use in venues, a segment in which Motorola Solutions already has a presence, according to company engineer Carlos Campos.

The technology remains in test mode with a theme park as a beta site. Stadiums are a key market, Campos said.

Another firm offering a security solution that’s already in use at Yankee Stadium, the Javits Center and the Time Warner Center in New York is Building Intelligence, which secures loading docks and other back-of-house areas.

Launched after 9/11, the company offers software that allows facilities to verify the identities and track the comings and goings of everyone accessing loading docks, lobbies and other spaces in public assembly venues. It can be particularly useful on large campuses and mixed-use settings like the Time Warner Center, said Jeffrey Friedman, the company’s founder and CEO. The system is Safety Act approved and can be integrated with existing infrastructure, Friedman said.

“It’s a simple idea,” he said. “For events, there is ticketing to prevent unauthorized ac-

NO NEED TO DIVEST: Next-generation security screening tools like the Evolv Express bring artificial intelligence to bear.

cess. This is sort of like doing ticketing but it’s more of a vendor management program.”

The cost for venues runs from \$1,200 a month to 10 times that rate for more complex facilities. The return on investment comes with decreased legal liability and insurance costs and efficient movement of vendors and data tied to the time they spend on site. If there’s an incident with damage or product loss, there’s a digital record of who’s responsible for the mishap, Friedman said.

Armored Things, a crowd intelligence software company that counts the Los Angeles Football Club as a client, shows venue operators where people are gathering and how they are moving through a venue, which has taken on added importance in light of the pandemic. The company uses data from existing infrastructure, including surveillance cameras and Wi-Fi, and feeds it to a command center, where it is processed using artificial intelligence. The result is a mapped visualization that can be fed to mobile devices, allowing operations personnel to make adjustments related to crowd density, use of space, concessions sales, sanitation and security.

Is there a danger in overreliance on technology as opposed to counting on people and observational skills and judgement?

“The answer is yes,” Zumwalt says. “In the venue world, we need to take advantage of whatever technology makes our environment more efficient and safe, but there is synergy between technology advances and the efforts of human staffing in application of our procedures.”

Zumwalt says training of security personnel hasn’t necessarily kept pace with advances in technology.

“It’s been recognized for 50 years that the private security industry has been woefully undereducated and unprepared to ensure quality work,” he said. “Therefore, the education and training of the personnel is also critical so that their judgment can be of value, and as important as technology.”

Donovan says that effective technology that allows a venue or to reduce or redeploy staff, especially part-timers engaged in something like guest screening, offers an opportunity for return on investment without sacrificing safety.

“Would I rather have proven technology in place that I can reduce the reliance on part-time staff? Absolutely, but I still have to have boots on the ground from a supervisor and management perspective to ensure that the process is working, that it’s being followed and we’re compliant with the best practices,” he said. “I would rather have 10 well-paid, highly experienced people managing technology that is adding value than having 50 low-paid, low-retention people as my first point of contact with my guests.”

SAFETY FIRST

BY JAMES ZOLTAK

Five questions with security professionals from around the industry

DAN DONOVAN

Founder and Managing Partner
Stratoscope

What's one new practice or technology that every venue should be using?

Touchless guest screening. Fans will be less inclined and have a heightened sensitivity to interact with unnecessary touchpoints when on site. The latest technology provides operators with the ability to do just this while maintaining a thorough search and the overall security posture.

How hard a line should be taken when enforcing mask wearing, distancing and other COVID-19-related protocols?

Every venue should be enforcing their local, county or state guidelines related to masks.

Will there be changes in the way general admission is handled?

General admission in a physical distancing environment may need to be reimagined in more of a group setting through seating pods and dedicated areas for individuals arriving to the venue together. Additional resources from a staffing and infrastructure standpoint will be required to maintain distancing guidelines. This will be a regional issue as each state, county and city's restrictions will need to be complied with.

Should venue operators know names and contact information of everyone in attendance, as airlines know who is in the seats of their aircraft?

Names and contact information would help event and venue operators in a number of facets. From a safety and security standpoint, this information will aid operators with incident response and investigation should issues arise. From a pandemic perspective, this information is crucial to contact tracing efforts in the event of infection. Contact information also could aid in ensuring a safe environment even be-

fore doors open to the event, similar to a "No Fly" list, staying with the airline analogy. Beyond the security realm, this information can help guest services departments with providing their guests with targeted, consistent communication to deliver the best experience possible.

How serious a threat to live events is domestic terrorism?

The "lone wolf" domestic threat is the most difficult challenge for the industry. This has been the No. 1 topic for the industry prior to COVID and will remain a significant topic as venues reopen and balance their security posture with "safety" guidelines. Now more than ever, event safety and security have to be completely integrated and working together.

JEFF SPOERNLE

Vice President, WESS

What is one new practice or technology that every venue should be using?

During the pandemic, following the CDC guidelines and incorporating them into your event operations plan is important to ensure the safety of the guests visiting a venue.

How hard a line should be taken when enforcing mask wearing, distancing and other COVID-19-related protocols?

It is a proven fact that following the CDC guidelines of mask wearing, social distancing and other protocols are effective with slowing the transmission of the virus. As the event industry reopens, it's important to have strict safety measures to rebuild the public's confidence in mass gatherings. Training the event day staff to properly educate guests about mask wearing and social distancing will prevent an event from turning into a COVID hotspot. Enforcement of the policies are critical and having an escalation process in place to handle non-compliant guests

is important to operating a successful enforcement plan.

Will there be changes in the way general admission is handled?

Redesigning the entry procedure to comply with COVID-19 protocols is part of the reopening plan for venues across the country. Adjusting the mindset of a crowd arriving 30 minutes before the start of an event is now an operational requirement and not a desire. Many venues have assigned specific times for ticket holders to enter or require the ticket holder to enter a specific gate to assist with social distancing on the ingress of the facility. Looking at restructuring the queue lines and metal detecting process to allow for proper social distancing and limiting contact points between individuals is required.

Should venue operators know names and contact information of everyone in attendance, as airlines know who is in the seats of their aircraft?

Proper contact tracing is an important element to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Venue operators having the names and contact information of everyone in attendance assists with conducting contract tracing if a COVID-19 case were to occur with an event attendee.

How serious a threat to live events is domestic terrorism?

Domestic terrorism is one of many threats to large scale public gatherings that is taken into consideration when creating the security program for a specific event or venue.

BILL SQUIRES

MetLife Stadium Operations
Consultant
New York Giants

What is one new practice or technology that every venue should be using?



**BILL
SQUIRES**

Thorough sanitization of the venue and contactless technology, for example, security screening at the gates, ticket scanning, cashless transactions (concessions and merchandise).

How hard a line should be taken when enforcing mask wearing, distancing and other COVID-19-related protocols?

As a survivor of a severe battle with COVID-19, I am a big proponent of the three basic protocols (washing hands, wearing face coverings and social distancing). Asking someone to cover their nose and mouth is not too much to ask. I think a guest should be warned once if they are violating this protocol and informed that they will be asked to leave the venue if they violate this simple policy again.

Will there be changes in the way general admission is handled?

I don't think general admission events are advisable in the foreseeable future.

Should venue operators know names and contact information of everyone in attendance, as airlines know who is in the seats of their aircraft?

Having the contact information for ticket holders would be nice to have, but I think ticket holders would object to this. Airlines need to maintain a manifest of passengers in the event of a crash.

How serious a threat to live events is domestic terrorism?

Active shooters are a concern to venue managers and security professionals. It can be a lone wolf or multiple domestic terrorists.

JEROME PICKETT

**SVP and GM, Sports
& Entertainment
Clear**

What's one new practice or technology that every venue should be using?

Every venue should be deploying technology that makes the fan journey frictionless while delivering experiences to fans in where they spend the most time — their mobile devices. Even

while attending an event fans want engagement through their devices and venues who reach fans where they are and anticipate where fans will want to go next will gain optimal engagement with fans.

How hard a line should be taken when enforcing mask wearing, distancing and other COVID-19-related protocols?

When enforcing any protocols there needs to be a balance between enforcement and guest experience. Health and safety protocols should be well communicated and event staff need to understand appropriate escalation and deconfliction steps. Attendees deserve a healthy and safe environment, so enforcement should be consistent and decisive.

Will there be changes in the way general admission is handled?

Many venues have changed how ingress works and have reduced based on local guidance general admission areas. Mask wearing, physical distancing and health insights for entry will be with us for some time. Venues have deployed technologies to help manage COVID/health clearance, created staggered entry times to manage crowd flow and have blocked off seating areas to promote distancing.

How serious a threat to live events is domestic terrorism?

Domestic terrorism continues to be a major threat to live events.

JEFFREY FRIEDMAN

**CEO
Building Intelligence**

What's one new practice or technology that every venue should be using?

Every building should work to capture the identity of individuals on site for a variety of reasons. From contact tracing to terrorism, knowing who is allowed where matters. Allowing an unknown person or vehicle into the building during any hour, whether during an event or on off days, is unacceptable. Surrounding buildings with a Safety Act certified concept of operation serves many purposes including lowering insurance costs, as well as operational costs.



**JEFFREY
FRIEDMAN**

How hard a line should be taken when enforcing mask wearing, distancing and other COVID-19-related protocols?

Every building must do mask enforcement where possible. Temperature checks are very challenging in terms of accuracy and value. A person who travels two or three hours to deliver something, fix something or engage with people who gets turned away at the door will lead to arguments and potentially a highly disruptive operation. Better to notify people before arrival about the protocol, require them to acknowledge the requirements by agreement and survey, and have the capacity to trace back the violators of the policy. This gets back to the first must, which is identify everyone on site. Contractors, sub-contractors, suppliers, families; the goal is to always know who is there, what condition they are in, and that they followed protocols.

Should venue operators know names and contact information of everyone in attendance, as airlines know who is in the seats of their aircraft?

Privacy is important and there are many techniques to ensure the privacy of the individual. You don't have to necessarily know the individual or maintain a record of their private information. What most venues really need is the ability to get the information if necessary, know that the person meets specific risk standards and agrees to provide their identity if required. Facilities may not want all of that data and be responsible for determining how long to retain it. What matters is that a trusted identity is available if required, and that the understanding between the individual and the operator is that their identity may be required. And that requirement, to turn over the information, is at the sole discretion of the operator.

How serious a threat to live events is domestic terrorism?

Safety is the most important amenity. The events over the last few years have emboldened many groups within our country to take up actions and arms against institutions. The targets are not just federal buildings or landmarks. I think it's safe to say that the risk of domestic terrorism at any location is higher at a wider variety of locations. That threat has been there for years; however, it would seem that the public is more aware of it now. Not only do we have to do the little things that make



ALAN
GELFAND

us safe. We have to let the audiences know we are making it safe with better operations and technologies. The threat goes well beyond the actual risk, but (to) the perception of the risk. We all must be vigilant to balance the pride in what we do without highlighting what we do, and at the same time we make people safe, ensure that they feel safe.

MARK HERRERA

**Director of Education and Life Safety
International Association of Venue
Managers**

What's one new practice or technology that every venue should be using?

Improving attendee experience and confidence by using mobile event apps offering features such as geofencing and GPS tracking could be one of many technologies used to enforce proper distancing. The importance of also using digital signage to communicate and enforce safety and security procedures.

How hard a line should be taken when enforcing mask wearing, distancing and other COVID-19-related protocols?

We know limiting face-to-face contact with others is the best way to reduce the spread of the virus and any communicable disease and in order to allow others to enjoy events where crowds assemble, we must assure we do what is reasonable to protect those attending an event. Therefore, venues should assure compliance in both social distancing and face coverings.

Will there be changes in the way general admission is handled?

There will be quick and efficient registration process with accelerated check-ins. Paperless forms and managing small to large crowds with proper spacing and distancing.

Should venue operators know names and contact information of everyone in attendance, as airlines know who is in the seats of their aircraft?

Obviously, understanding the attendee journey is an integral part of increasing your event ROI and having more intelligence and information of those attending would be ideal. Event mobile apps track-

ing attendees registered with assigned seating would allow venue operators to track attendees.

How serious a threat to live events is domestic terrorism?

For the last 20 years our biggest concern was international terrorism. However, domestic terrorism has superseded the threat of international terrorism. Extremists motivated by political, racial, ethnic, economic, health, and other grievances will remain the most persistent and lethal threat in the Homeland. Targeting mass gatherings at events especially during times when facilities are most vulnerable in the midst of crisis continues to be a focus for all venue operators.

ALAN GELFAND

**CEO and Founder
Fair Ticket Solutions**

What's one new practice or technology that every venue should be using?

Pre-clearance of identity and health status prior to the event and tied to the ticket using biometrics.


How hard a line should be taken when enforcing mask wearing, distancing and other COVID-19-related protocols?

Until a vaccine is widely distributed, and the risk of infection basically disappears, it's imperative to follow whatever protocols are current with government orders or recommendations.

Will there be changes in the way general admission is handled?

Absolutely. Identity and health status requirements without sacrificing the customer experience or restricting their options need to be adopted.

Should venue operators know names and contact information of everyone in attendance, as airlines know who is in the seats of their aircraft?

One hundred percent. The fact that a person is known to a venue encourages, if nothing more, that attendee to be well mannered and appropriately behaved. That gives other attendees more comfort in attending. 

'They will upgrade the customer experience,' league's Cathy Lanier says at SMA Annual Seminar

BY DON MURET

THE PANDEMIC PUSHED the NFL to introduce new technologies for health and safety protocols at a high cost, but the additional protection will save money in the long run for teams and venues, said Cathy Lanier, the league's senior vice president and chief security officer.

Lanier spoke on a panel with security personnel from other leagues during the Stadium Managers Association Annual Seminar, held virtually Feb. 9-10.

Facial recognition, biometrics and access control, among other touchless and contactless systems, were incorporated by many NFL teams. All were driven by COVID-19 and the need to protect all parties to proceed with the 2020 season, Lanier said.

"Everything we did was with proper PPE in mind (and) embedded in everything we do, and to accomplish these things, we had to bring in technologies," she said. "A lot of them we've been looking at, but for one reason or another, it was not adopted yet. In some cases, customers did not embrace them or it was a matter of trust."

"They're going to stay with us," she said. "They will upgrade the customer experience and provide safety and security as well. Fans in our stadiums appreciate the speed with which they can enter and make a purchase and do all of these things without worrying about health and safety."

The technology worked as intended. For two weeks after every regular-season game, NFL officials tracked data through contact tracing devices with local health departments and found no connections between fans attending games and the spread of coronavirus, Lanier said.

Those investments were made with teams recognizing they couldn't host crowds at full capacity, which cut into everyone's bottom line. But they learned there are things they could do to offset some of those increased operating costs and decreased revenue on the event side, she said.

"What we learned from the virtual draft is there are streaming opportunities and ways to keep your fans engaged and merchandising and all those other sponsorships to keep you moving ahead," Lanier said.

The 2020 NFL draft itself stood out as one example for how to be flexible and adapt in a COVID environment, she said. After the 2019 draft in Nashville drew a record 600,000, the league anticipated an even bigger number in Las Vegas, the site of the 2020 event.

That all changed after the pandemic hit in March, throwing 18 months of preparation out the window, Lanier said. The league shifted to a televised and virtual model and pulled it off with great reviews.

"The unexpected lesson was people loved it," she said. "People were not only starved for entertainment but for some sense of normalcy. They loved the aspect of seeing the personal lives of football heroes and coaches such as (Bill) Belichick and his dog."

As the virtual world of Zoom and Webex communications became the go-to method for conducting business in the general workforce, NFL officials knew they had to change and keep pace regardless of the challenges. By mid-summer, with everything shut down and virus levels on the rise, the league was faced with getting people back to work that could not do their jobs remotely, such as its in-house broadcast and security teams.

They also had to get players and coaches back into training camp mode and form a plan for getting fans back into stadiums in the states and cities where mass gatherings were allowed during the 2020 season. Even with the virtual draft, the NFL was prohibited from having more than 10 people gathered at one site, according to New York state law, Lanier said.

The NFL paid close attention to the NBA, NHL and MLB bubble formats to help determine how to get its essential employees back to work, players back on the practice field and fans into the venues. All told, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention served as the NFL's "bible" for rules and guidelines for the pandemic, she said.

The league also followed World Health Organization mandates, eliminating international games for 2020. It kept up with state and local guidelines, which changed daily, along with Occupational Safety and Health Administration workforce stipulations and U.S. Department of Homeland Security rules for traveling across state lines with quarantine orders, Lanier said.

"To play all our games and keep the schedule (mostly) intact through the Super Bowl was an incredible thing to be part of and a learning experience," she said. "While movie theaters, concerts and other entertainment were shut down, we had to carry on all



NFL CHIEF SECURITY OFFICER: COVID-DRIVEN TECH WILL STAY

activities around football and we did. Failure was not an option."

The NFL did an excellent job of prioritizing play and training camp initially before addressing fan attendance, said Matt Kenny, the Kansas City Chiefs' vice president of stadium services and events.

Kenny sat on a separate SMA panel with fellow NFL stadium operators Troy Brown and Zach Hensley.

While there was uncertainty over the entire process, setting up an organized plan allowed facility operators to focus on the priorities at hand, knowing the league would provide guidance and support for taking the next steps when the time was right, Kenny said.

"Once the CDC put in the 6-foot social distancing rule, we knew what our capacity was going to be and it came down to square footage," said Brown, the Cleveland Browns' vice president of stadium operations. "When it came to hosting fans, it was led by the medical folks, not revenue."

At FirstEnergy Stadium, the Browns kept game day staffing levels at 70% to 80% despite attendance restrictions of 20%. Cost wasn't an issue. The driver was how to run the venue most efficiently with new protocols. There

were some COVID issues with staff, but it was mostly related to bringing the virus from home, Brown said.

"There were a lot of moving pieces, but we did it," he said. "We were able to host 6,000 fans for our first two games and then got state and local clearance to go up to 13,500 for our other six games. With a little bit of luck and strict protocols in place, we made it through without any fans tied back to COVID cases at our games."

"The league led the charge and once we knew what we were up against, a lot of stress went away," Brown said.

The communication between the NFL and stadium managers was the best it has ever been, said Hensley, the Seattle Seahawks' vice president of venue operations and guest experience. The weekly and biweekly calls with all 30 facility operators discussing best practices had not been done before, Hensley said.

"It helped everybody get better," he said. "One of the things that I learned is ... we always keep something hidden because it's like our little secret about how good we are. Everybody shared everything across every single sector. Whatever it might be, there was a sharing of resources to provide the safest environment possible." ▀

EYE ON THE GAME: The NFL's Cathy Lanier speaks at a news conference before the Super Bowl in 2020.

Manchester City's new **TOUCHLESS SECURITY SCREENING**

By Nathan Bailey, Evolv Technology

SUPPORTERS WILL BENEFIT FROM AN IMPROVED MATCHDAY EXPERIENCE AT THE ETIHAD STADIUM

Welcoming thousands of supporters into sports stadia in a time-efficient manner has always been a priority for clubs around the world.

With the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic ensuring that the highest standards of public health and safety are maintained, alongside an efficient and smooth operation, has never been more important.

“*We chose Evolv to enhance the supporter experience at the Etihad Stadium to ensure that the screening process on arrival is a smooth and seamless operation.*”

~ Manchester City FC

New Technology

In June of 2019, Manchester City FC entered into discussions with Evolv about the company's Evolv Express® system, which provides security screening using touchless technology.

The club witnessed firsthand the free-flow nature of the touchless system the company provides, benefiting from the ability to screen thousands of supporters in a timeframe that would not have been achievable before.

Following the onset of the Coronavirus, the world of sports shut down and the once vibrant matchday which saw thousands of supporters enjoying live sport fell silent.



Over the summer months, the English Premier League began 'Project Restart' to bring the sport back in a 'Behind Closed Doors' format. Whilst this meant that Manchester City supporters were unable to attend matches, the wider club operation sprang back into action with new guidelines in place to protect everyone on site at the Etihad Stadium, which included social distancing.

Evolv Express was piloted for the remainder of the season's matches and was used to ensure that everyone who entered the stadium was able to do so in a manner which prioritised health and safety, as well as ensuring they benefited from an efficient experience with minimal queuing times.

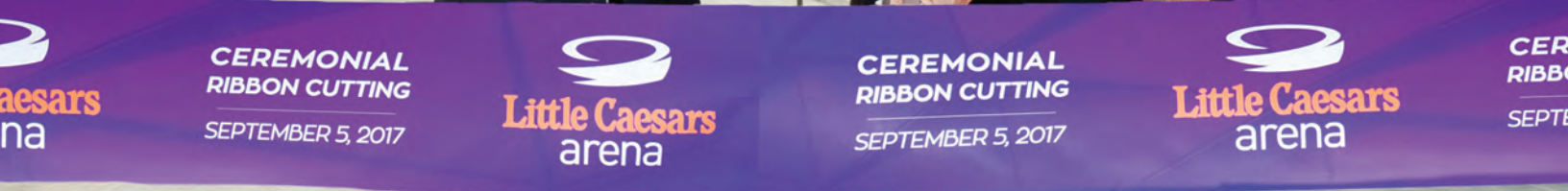
When the Etihad Stadium is permitted to reopen its doors to supporters again, Evolv Express will remain in place so that supporters can be welcomed back with fast, touchless and respectful screening, providing them with an enhanced matchday experience.



It's Time to Go Touchless!

Sign up for a Demo at
learn.evolvtechnology.com/venues

A FINE RIDE



IN DETROIT

NOTHING LITTLE ABOUT IT:
Tom Wilson (right) and Chris Ilitch cut the ribbon at Little Caesars Arena in Detroit.

Tom Wilson, builder of arenas and brands, has helped reshape sports in the Motor City

BY DON MURET

SEAN HENRY WALKED into the Palace of Auburn Hills in October 1990 wearing his favorite Boston Celtics hat when he ran into Tom Wilson, president of the arena and the Detroit Pistons. Henry, now president and CEO of the Nashville Predators, was trying to find his way to Volume Services' office, where he started as a trainee for the food vendor.

Wilson asked Henry why he was wearing the colors of the Pistons' heated rival.

"I had no idea who he really was and I didn't really care at 22 years old," Henry said. "I looked at him like, 'What's wrong with this guy?' Here I am, fresh out of college, smarter than anybody. I told him I was a Celtic fan and walked away."

Henry discovered his gaffe after locating the office of Volume

Services General Manager Joe Ambrose, who heard about the exchange. "He was ready to kill whoever's walking through that door in a Celtic hat," Henry said.

"I thought I was going to die," he said. "From that moment on, I realized how important a team's brand was. I tell that story now to our young employees and they can't believe it, because I'm the most brand-centric guy in the world and learned that more from Tom than anyone else."

Wilson had that influence over many folks during his five decades in the business, whether it was the Pistons or the NHL's Detroit Red Wings, where he spent the past 10 years with Olympia Entertainment after 32 years with Palace Sports & Entertainment.

For Wilson, 71, a Detroit native who stepped down from Olympia in December, it's been a spectacular ride.

It started in the mid-1970s with Wilson working in ticket sales for the Los Angeles Lakers. He had moved to LA after college to become an actor and had a bit part in "Barnaby Jones," the TV detective drama starring Buddy Ebsen, as a player fixing basketball games for the mob. They filmed the scene at the Forum, where the Lakers played from 1967 to 1999. During shooting breaks, Wilson played hoops with Lakers staff, including head of marketing Dan Trutanich. After attending a few games with Trutanich, Wilson got a job offer and accepted it.

"Most sports administration programs don't suggest getting into sports this way, but it worked for me," he joked.

DOWNTOWN DREAMS

In 1978, Wilson returned to Detroit to work for the Pistons and took over as team president

one year later. Over the course of his career, Wilson was instrumental in building two arenas in his hometown, starting with the Palace, which opened in 1988 in the affluent Detroit suburb of Auburn Hills, followed by Little Caesars Arena in 2017. He also spearheaded the purchase of Pine Knob Music Theatre, now DTE Energy Music Theatre, which turned into North America's busiest outdoor music venue (see story, Page 34).

Along the way, Wilson oversaw three championships apiece with the Pistons and WNBA's Detroit Shock; one Stanley Cup title with the NHL's Tampa Bay Lightning in 2004 when Pistons owner Bill Davidson owned them; and a pair of minor league crowns in hockey and arena football.

The final chapter came in 2010. The Ilitch family was starting to plan Little Caesars Arena and District Detroit, a multibillion-dollar redevelopment covering 50 blocks in and adjacent to downtown. Wilson got immersed in the project after Chris Ilitch, president and CEO of Ilitch Holdings, owner of the Red Wings and MLB's Detroit Tigers, hired him to lead the effort.

For those who know the history behind the sports and entertainment landscape in Detroit, Wilson's move came as a shock, considering that he was entrenched at Palace Sports, a fierce competitor with Olympia and the old Joe Louis Arena.

It made more sense after Davidson died in 2009 and the team was sold to Tom Gores two years later. As is typically the case with new owners, they bring their own people in to run the organization. Wilson knew it could happen and one year before the Pistons were sold, he jumped at the chance to help reinvent downtown Detroit.

Little Caesars Arena ultimately became home to both the Pistons and Red Wings.

"Tom's experience in multiple



LIGHTING THE FIRE: At the Palace of Auburn Hills, Wilson created an arena that became a prototype for other NBA franchises.



HOLDING COURT: Wilson speaks at a halftime ceremony honoring Pistons owner Bill Davidson at the Palace on Dec. 16, 2005.

sports, his deep understanding of the concert business and his ability to enhance the customer experience brought tremendous insight and perspective to our team,” Ilitch said. “Being from Detroit, Tom understood how the heart and soul of the area could be reflected in the arena experience.”

Similar to the Palace, Little Caesars Arena, built for \$863 million, set the bar high for design. The main concourse, themed as The Via with an ethylene tetrafluoroethylene ceiling to bring natural light into the space, gives patrons the feel of walking down a European street in an open-air market environment, tied to concessions designed as storefront restaurants.

Wilson, among many others, sat at the table as those plans were developed, and his experience at the Palace was invaluable in steering the development, said architect Ryan Gedney, HNTB’s national director, who at the time was working for HOK on the project.

“Little Caesars Arena did a lot of things really different in design and to take those ideas to fruition requires people like Tom to make sure that innovation speaks to the business of Olympia Entertainment and their bottom line,” Gedney said. “There were a lot of people on that project saying ‘What if?’ Tom kept things grounded, and you don’t get that on every project in one person.”

It became a pricey venture, with about \$325 million in public money involved. Little Caesars Arena, owned by the

Detroit Downtown Development Authority, doubled in cost from the original price tag, and some critics point to what they feel is the District’s slow development.

Others, such as veteran Detroit concert promoter Rick Franks, point to the Ilitch family’s commitment to bringing life back to the city’s inner core.

“It’s so unfounded,” Franks said of the criticism. “You need to look at it 10 years later, not 10 months. The only thing I can point to is all of the housing, condos and apartment development in and around downtown, and the final piece was putting Little Caesars Arena together. The Ilitches put a billion dollars of their own money into it. That doesn’t happen often.”

Most recently, the pandemic has slowed District development, Wilson said. It’s going to take a few years to get back on track, but it was the right thing to do for the city, he said.

Rebuilding a key piece of the city brought everything full circle for Wilson, Henry said. “To redevelop such a big part of downtown with the team that he fought against for many years has to be rewarding for him,” he said. “Just watching that (unfold) myself, it’s been fun.”

A REVOLUTIONARY PALACE

The Pistons’ decision to move to Little Caesars Arena came in late 2016, one year before the arena opened. It spelled the end of the Palace, which was torn down last summer. But the mem-

ories remain of a building that set a benchmark for design and a business model tied to running most aspects of arena operations in-house for a privately funded venue.

Under owner Davidson, the Pistons desired an arena to call their own after playing 10 years at the old Pontiac Silverdome, an 80,000-seat NFL stadium. For basketball, the sightlines were poor. Overall, it wasn’t a positive experience for Pistons fans. They drew well for the Celtics and Los Angeles Lakers. Otherwise, Silverdome crowds were in the range of 4,000 during those lean years in the late 1970s through the early ’80s, resulting in promotions such as four free Pistons tickets with a fill-up at Marathon Oil gas stations, said former Palace sales executive Dan Hauser.

At the time, the Pistons were going through a stretch of six subpar seasons on the court, but things turned around starting with the 1983-84 season, two years before Palace construction started in 1986.

“We were fortunate that Bill Davidson decided he was going to pay for the arena itself, which gets you out of the red tape (with public bodies),” Wilson said. “The big thing was it needed to be designed in a way that we weren’t coming to him every six months, saying we didn’t make our numbers again and we needed more money.”

The Palace’s 180 suites, positioned midlevel as part of architect Rossetti’s design, were distinct in terms of the sheer

number and proximity to the floor — the first level was 16 rows from the court. The lease terms reflected their position. Suites ran from \$30,000 to \$120,000 annually. At that time, nobody else in the NBA charged more than \$50,000 a year for suites, Wilson said.

It helped pay for the \$90 million in construction, a key move considering the Palace borrowed money at 17% interest in the late 1980s, he said. Making it all work was a heavy lift but it all came together. The Palace set off one of the biggest building booms in sports with many other NBA teams developing new arenas over the next decade.

Wilson remembers NBA Commissioner David Stern telling everyone at an owners meeting: “Gentlemen, you have one job this year; you’ve got to get to Auburn Hills and see that arena. We’re no longer just in the basketball business. We’re in the arena and entertainment business.”

“There was a steady stream of people coming in and the early adopters were in Chicago and Phoenix,” Wilson said. “The building proved it could make money as opposed to others funded by municipalities that were such a money pit. It really changed an industry.”

FILLING DATES

It wasn’t easy. Competing against Joe Louis Arena, which opened in 1979 and was controlled by Olympia Entertainment, Palace Sports & Entertainment had to get creative to fill the venue with special events apart from Pistons games.

Olympia had locked in booking exclusives at Joe Louis Arena with Feld Entertainment and the old Brass Ring Productions, a concert promoter. Those deals meant that Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus and Disney on Ice, for example, couldn’t play Auburn Hills, plus major concert tours in a strong rock market that produced the likes of Alice Cooper, Ted Nugent and Bob Seger.

Palace Sports countered by booking the Royal Hanneford Circus, a show dating to the 1600s. Palace Sports gave away a lot of complimentary tickets, but the circus drew 150,000 people, performing two to three shows a day over a 10-day stretch. Most important, Palace Sports paid the circus a flat fee and kept 100



CELEBRATING A LEGENDARY CAREER

TOM WILSON

Tom, your vision and commitment to excellence will long be a testament showcasing your dedication to entertainment and sports fans in Detroit.

Congratulations on your retirement,





GOING YARDLEY: Wilson (center) and George Yardley's family recognize the former Detroit Pistons great in 2008.

percent of ticket, concessions and merchandise revenue. Feld brings in its own branded line of food and retail concessions, keeping all revenue.

"We made a lot more money than we would have with Ringling," Wilson said. "It kept the lights on and people got comfortable coming out there. It was considered the boonies at the time. We had come from the Silverdome, which was considered the end of civilization and we moved three miles past it."

Franks knows the situation well regarding the booking exclusives at Joe Louis Arena. He worked at Brass Ring for seven years before leaving the firm to form a partnership with Jack Boyle at Cellar Door Productions. The Brass Ring-Olympia deal effectively "boxed" them out of The Joe. They worked around it, booking regional shows in Grand Rapids and Lansing, plus Toledo and Columbus in Ohio.

When the Palace opened, it gave Cellar Door a prime opportunity to bid for tours and put the arena on the map, Franks said.

For those working under Wilson at the Palace, the entrepre-

neurial spirit coursed through their veins. He let the sales and marketing staff "run with ideas" to generate revenue and exposure for Detroit's new kid on the block, said ex-Palace Sports executive Marilyn Hauser.

She spent 25 years in Auburn Hills in booking and marketing at the Palace and is now senior vice president of programming for Barclays Center in Brooklyn, New York. (Dan Hauser, her husband, worked 30 years with Wilson dating to the Silverdome).

"Tom never micromanaged," Hauser said. "It's the old saying, there's no bad idea except for no idea. Whatever we came up with, he supported. I never felt like I 'worked' there. I loved it and that was because of him. He created a great culture. We were like a family."

A NEW LEVEL OF SERVICE

The highest level of customer service became part of the culture under Wilson's stewardship. The Walt Disney Co. set the standard, and Wilson paid close attention to their operation and applied those principles at the Palace, years

before big league teams took the extra step to hire Disney Institute to train staff in customer service.

The Palace introduced a parents room, where adults could hang out, drink coffee and snack on Danish while their children attended a show. Similar to the Disney touch, it's a feature at entertainment venues that's common now, but 30 years ago it was relatively new in the industry.

The arena was immaculate as well, another point of distinction, said those who worked there, including Henry and media relations professional Bill Wickett. Together, they moved to Tampa in 1999 with Henry after Davidson bought the NHL team. Wickett recently accepted a job with the Predators, where he rejoins Henry as the team's executive vice president and chief marketing officer.

Guest services was "priority one," Wickett said. If a customer dropped a soda or popcorn, for example, staff were empowered to escort them to the nearest concession stand and immediately replace the item at no charge.

"It's something simple, but Tom wanted to make sure

every time a guest came into the facility, they were the most important customer," Wickett said. "It didn't matter whether they sat in a lower level suite or the upper deck. They all needed to be treated equally and first class."

As 2021 unfolds, there's still a lot of uncertainty over sports and entertainment as the pandemic retains its grip on the industry. Wilson agrees with others predicting that live entertainment will explode with tours after everyone is vaccinated and feels comfortable returning to concerts.

Whether Wilson is part of it remains up in the air. He enjoys retirement on Florida's Gulf Coast, but somewhere, there might be another venue to be built.

"We have a home in Naples and I'm sitting outside and the sun is shining and it's 80 degrees," he said in late December. "But there's a part of me that thinks maybe I'll do it again if the phone rings. I've got this little thing on my shoulder that says, 'You've got nine championship rings. Wouldn't it be nice to have 10?' Yes, it would." ▀



PALACIAL DIGS: The Palace of Auburn Hills set a standard for design and programming.

HOTTICKETS PALACE OF AUBURN HILLS

Ranked by gross. Based on data from concerts and events 1988-2017, as reported to Pollstar.

RANK	GROSS	EVENT	ATTENDEES	PROMOTER	DATE	SHOWS
1	\$7,780,700	Barbra Streisand	45,160	Cellar Door Concerts, Belkin Productions	May 15-19, 1994	3
2	\$4,733,526	Paul McCartney	33,511	Live Nation	Oct. 14-15, 2005	2
3	\$4,669,250	Billy Joel & Elton John	41,836	Clear Channel Entertainment	May 2-3, 2003	2
4	\$4,454,302	Bob Seger & The Silver Bullet Band	71,123	Live Nation, Blackbird Productions	Dec. 20-30, 2006	4
5	\$4,127,533	Madonna	35,407	Clear Channel Entertainment	Aug. 25-26, 2001	2
6	\$3,951,103	U2	41,379	Live Nation Global Touring	Oct. 24-25, 2005	2
7	\$3,446,730	Bob Seger & The Silver Bullet Band	119,177	Cellar Door Concerts, Belkin Productions	March 10-14, 1996	6
8	\$3,349,343	Bob Seger & The Silver Bullet Band	47,632	Live Nation	May 17-21, 2011	3
9	\$3,193,346	Simon & Garfunkel	31,011	Clear Channel Entertainment	Oct. 18-19, 2003	2
10	\$3,171,218	Tim McGraw & Faith Hill	39,968	Live Nation	May 5-6, 2006	2

HOTTICKETS DTE ENERGY MUSIC THEATRE

Ranked by gross. Based on data from concerts and events 1982-2019, as reported to Pollstar.

RANK	GROSS	EVENT	ATTENDEES	PROMOTER	DATE	SHOWS
1	\$2,487,428	Kid Rock	63,082	Live Nation	July 19-25, 2008	4
2	\$2,348,280	Kid Rock	117,414	Live Nation	Aug. 9-20, 2013	8
3	\$2,021,997	Kid Rock	47,427	Live Nation	Aug. 13-15, 2010	3
4	\$1,952,915	Lollapalooza	61,388	Cellar Door Concerts, Belkin Productions, Ritual	July 23-29, 1994	4
5	\$1,807,377	Ozzfest	30,638	Clear Channel Entertainment	July 30-31, 2001	2
6	\$1,602,356	Ozzfest	28,799	Clear Channel Entertainment	July 24-25, 2003	2
7	\$1,565,845	Ozzfest	28,092	Clear Channel Entertainment	Aug. 7-8, 2002	2
8	\$1,512,175	Ozzfest	31,462	Cellar Door Concerts, Belkin Productions, SFX Music Group	June 25-27, 1999	2
9	\$1,497,799	Kid Rock	46,409	Cellar Door Concerts, SFX Music Group	Aug. 25-Sept. 1, 2000	3
10	\$1,488,651	Lilith Fair	44,364	Belkin Productions, Ritual, Cellar Door Concerts	July 6-8, 1998	3

TOM WILSON BROUGHT BACK AN AMPHITHEATER — AND THE AMPHITHEATER BUSINESS

BY DON MURET

TOM WILSON IS most closely identified with developing two arenas in Greater Detroit. The sports and entertainment executive's vision for revitalizing the market's underperforming amphitheater sometimes gets forgotten among his accomplishments.

In November 1990, Palace Sports & Entertainment acquired Pine Knob Music Theatre, now

DTE Energy Music Theatre, for roughly \$10 million. The Nederlander Organization owned and operated the facility, which opened on June 25, 1972, with a matinee performance by TV heartthrob David Cassidy.

Over time, though, it became run-down and was booking fewer than 20 shows over the summer months in the 1980s, Wilson said.

Starting in 1991, after Palace Sports took over the shed, Pine Knob was packed with 80 concerts annually.

Some acts such as classic rocker Eddie Money became an annual draw at the 15,000-capacity venue. The "Money Man" traditionally kicked off the outdoor concert season on Memorial Day weekend. (Eddie Money's final concert was May 25, 2019, at DTE before he died of cancer that September).

"We just felt that outdoor entertainment was a gold mine in Michigan because our summer is so short and people go see anybody just to be outdoors," Wilson said. "We went from 18 shows to 83, almost every day, which is a little crazy. To do that, we booked everybody from (Canadian children's act) Fred Penner to Tony Bennett."

"It was all about the exposure and became part of the summer," he said.

The amphitheater is part of a ski resort in Clarkston, Mich., a Detroit suburb. Former Palace executive vice president Dan Hauser worked with Wilson for more than 30 years and in 2001 sold naming rights for the amphitheater to a local utility, an agreement that remains intact today.

"Tom could see how things could be and not how they are today, much like the Palace," he said.

Sports media relations professional Bill Wickett grew up in Detroit and got his start at the Palace

in 1993. Wickett remembers his father taking him to see his first concert at Pine Knob, Captain & Tennille, in the 1970s.

"Pine Knob was basically on the verge of bankruptcy before Palace Sports & Entertainment bought it and turned it into the most successful amphitheater in the country, year over year," he said.

In the late 1980s, part of the reason for Pine Knob's lack of programming was the Palace "stealing" a lot of concerts to keep the arena busy during the summer months, said Detroit promoter Rick Franks.

"It was our job to get every show possible at the Palace and we did, and then we carried that relationship over to Pine Knob," Franks said.

At first, the Nederlander family refused to sell Pine Knob, which prompted Wilson to propose building an amphitheater in the Palace parking lot. Hauser remembers the blueprints for a space west of the arena, next to the Pistons' practice facility.

Most of the 5,000 parking spaces were on wetlands, which most likely would have prohibited construction, Wilson said. In addition, Franks said the city of Auburn Hills probably would have opposed the project over traffic issues and noise violations in the neighborhood.

CHRIS SCHWEGLER; COURTESY OLYMPIA ENTERTAINMENT

SHOW AFTER SHOW: DTE Energy Music Theatre, with a capacity of about 15,000, is among the country's busiest amphitheaters.



In the end, regardless of their intentions, Nederlander got the message and sold Pine Knob to Palace Sports, which invested millions of dollars in upgrades over the next several years after surveying concertgoers about crowded bathrooms and concession stands, and traffic jams coming in and out of the venue.

Wilson was the “chessmaster” who made the Pine Knob deal happen, Franks said. Now with Live Nation, Franks has booked concerts there for 32 years. DTE Energy Music Theatre remains a top-grossing amphitheater today under the operation of 313 Presents, the live entertainment arm of the Ilitch family organization.

In 1994, building on the success of Pine Knob, Palace Sports signed a deal with Oakland University to run Meadow Brook Music Festival, a smaller amphitheater in Rochester Hills, Michigan. Today, Meadow Brook also falls under the direction of 313 Presents.

“It wasn’t just that Pine Knob was an underperforming venue; it was an underperforming industry,” said Sean Henry, president of the Nashville Predators, who ran concessions at the venue back in the day. “Pine Knob pushed it forward quite a bit. I still have a gym bag Tom Wilson gave me one Christmas that says ‘88 Shows.’” ▣



AS THEY SAID IT

“Tom built two of the best venues in North America.”

— Rick Franks

“At one time, downtown was (considered) the ‘bad guys.’ Chris Ilitch saw what Tom did in helping develop the Palace from the very beginning. They put a deal together for what turned out to be Little Caesars Arena.”

— Franks

“Promoters made so much money (at the Palace) that they kept coming back. We kept telling everybody that it had the best acoustics in the country. We had no idea, but it seemed like it would.”

— Tom Wilson

“We used to preach this ... if we take care of the arena, so will our guests. We could put a heavy metal band in there and the building would look just as good when they left as it did when they came in.”

— Wilson

“A lot of times, people don’t get a chance to build one arena in their hometown, much less two. Little Caesars Arena was Chris Ilitch’s vision and dream, and all of us played a small part in making that come true.”

— Wilson

“I sit in the arena bowl with my family for every (Nashville Predators) game and

hang out by the doors when everybody leaves the building. Wherever someone asks me where I get that from, I laugh. I was lucky to grow up in (the Palace) organization where that was commonplace. You were the oddball if you didn’t do that.”

— Sean Henry

“Tom understood the power of the media better than anybody, not only earned media but any marketing and paid media you could take advantage of.”

— Bill Wickett

“A lot of teams came to (the Palace) to see what we did to bring it back to their cities and replicate it.

Tom was such a forward thinker, always positive. He gave us the opportunity to make our own decisions.”

— Marilyn Hauser

“We had a great owner in Bill Davidson that allowed us to do the business, starting with Tom. That’s a big part of the equation and shouldn’t be forgotten.”

— Dan Hauser

“Tom was informed about every single facet about the business and always had an eye toward future opportunity.”

— Henry

Gathered by Don Muret



HAIL, CAESARS: Wilson was part of the development of Little Caesars Arena in downtown Detroit.

SPOTLIGHT

TEXAS

Things continue to be quiet across the venue landscape as the live events industry continues to prepare for a comeback. Here are a few things we found happening in Texas.



AGGIES ALL AROUND: A festival on campus at Texas A&M University.

College Station

AFTER UNUSUAL FIRST YEAR, DAVIS READY TO BRING MORE SHOWS TO REED ARENA

BY ROB KNAPP

DARREN DAVIS ARRIVED at Texas A&M University and found his first show wrapped up with a bow on it.

"My boss set me up for success when he hired me. He said, 'Hey, it'd be great if you could come in the door with an event already in your pocket, right?'" said Reed, who became general manager of the university's on-campus events center, Reed Arena, about a year ago. "And I said, 'Oh, that's great.'"

The event, a speaking engagement with popular golf commentator David Feherty, was booked, and ...

"We put the show on sale the exact day that South by Southwest canceled," said Reed, referring to the 2020 edition of the annual Austin conference and festivals built around music and film, an early U.S. victim of the pandemic's arrival. "And I knew when that happened, I said, 'Man, we are in trouble here.' And so it was only about a week later, but then I had to take the show down myself."

Welcome to College Station, Mr. Davis. "I knew I was in for a bit of an interesting ride for the remainder of my first year," he said.

Davis said he moved to Texas to be closer to family, coming from Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, where he was vice president of entertainment and

oversaw venues that included the 12,000-seat Events Center. He was hired not only to run a 13,000-seat building that houses Southeastern Conference basketball and volleyball programs but also to bring more nonathletic events and special event programming to town. College Station and the adjacent city of Bryan are the center of a metropolitan area with an estimated 273,000 residents about an hour north of Greater Houston.

Though COVID-19 drove the Feherty date into the rough and kept things quiet around Reed Arena for a while, events have returned, anchored by Aggie sports. "We did men's and women's basketball, and volleyball," Davis said. "And then around that same time in September, we started doing our home football games (at Kyle Field) at 25% capacity, which is right around 25,000 for us, right? So in a 100,000-seat stadium, that's still a lot of people."

Beyond sports, Reed Arena welcomed back Breakaway Ministries, a church service that's had a presence on campus for years, Davis said. Its Tuesday night events have historically drawn anywhere from 2,500 to 10,000 people.

"We ended up getting approved for 2,000 people, and in the very first ... event we had 1,800 people in the building, socially distanced. (We) used ... a seating model that we did for our sporting events."

"It was a pretty easy event to start with because that event is extremely well-behaved," he said. "They will do exactly what the organizers of the event ask them to do. No confrontation about wearing masks, none of that. So we had 100% compliance on masks, everybody sat where they were supposed to, did what they were supposed to do. So it was a great event to start out."

Preparing to bring people back into Reed, Davis discovered one of the advantages of working at an institution of higher education. "This is my first time ever working at a university campus," he said. "And to have resources like your own epidemiologist on staff at the university, that's an advantage that I've never been exposed to or had before." That was in addition to the help and guidance from the SEC and other schools



HOT REED: Reed Arena has continued to safely host sports and events during the pandemic.

in the conference.

Davis said the school's indoor facilities are doing many of the same things that others are to keep guests safe and healthy — queuing plan for concession stand lines, designating entry and exit points for restrooms and so on — “but I think we’re probably one of the few in the country that invested in drone technology,” which allows 13,000 seats to be sanitized in a relatively short amount of time. The drone is being leased from Charlotte, North Carolina-based Lucent Technologies.

Davis has also brought people outside Reed. “We have done a parking lot concert, which was my first ever in my 26-year career,” he said.

“I used the model that Live Nation came out with last year, where they did a few of them with Brad Paisley and Darius Rucker and a few others,” he said. “And so I took some of the best practices from that and created my own version of that, and we were able to host For King & Country. Sold out a parking lot concert for 360 vehicles.”

The event came together with KSBJ-FM out of Houston. “They have historically done a lot of religious events inside of Reed,”



NEW SHERIFF IN TOWN: Darren Davis arrived from Las Vegas to increase nonsports events at Reed and other campus locations.

said Davis. The result was a three-show area run for the band, with one outside of Reed and two in Houston.

Davis has another drive-in show and two ticketed events inside Reed, all for April, that he said would be announced soon, and another indoor event planned for June. The indoor events will likely have capacity limited to 3,000-3,500 attendees.

Outside of the arena, Davis is seeking out new places for events.

“I quickly recognized that the arena is a busy, busy arena. So I looked for other opportunities on campus where we could maybe program events,” he said. His eyes soon fell on Kyle Field and its 100,000 seats.

“I quickly developed what I’m calling my outdoor amphitheater setup,” he said. The plan involves 18,000 seats on the west side of the stadium and a performance area at the base of the bowl.

“We’ve manifested this con-

cept. Got it all plotted out, just like I do for the arena,” Davis said. “If a show came in tomorrow and told me they wanted to play in this space, I would have a manifest prepared and ready to go and a budget and everything else.”

Another potential outdoor space is a 17-acre parking lot called Fan Field that is used as overflow parking for football games, which Davis calls a beautiful space for a festival.

Another space, near the school's equestrian facility, is being targeted for a new festival that could debut as soon as when students return to campus in August or September.

But none of those potential growth areas diminish what Davis sees as great opportunities for Reed Arena, in part based on its convenience for tours routing into Texas' big cities.

“This venue probably has not been on the radar of the agents and managers and show producers, and so my main focus over this next year, now that COVID is kind of winding down, hopefully, my main focus is going to be reintroducing this venue to the industry,” he said. “It is a very viable, very legitimate, very good stop on someone's tour to do shows at this venue.”

San Antonio

BLAYNE TUCKER ON THE FERTILE MUSIC MARKET 80 MILES FROM AUSTIN

BY ERIC RENNER
BROWN

WHEN VENUESNOW REACHES San Antonio promoter, venue operator, and entertainment attorney Blayne Tucker, the Lone Star State's second-largest city is enduring its coldest temperatures since 1989. Perhaps that's why Tucker goes for a metaphor of a tropical nature.

"San Antonio tends to be what I think of as the Galapagos Islands of music development, the sort of forgotten place," he says. "It gets left out in the typical circuit of events."

Tucker grew up in San Antonio, and has spent his life asserting his city's live mettle, even as Austin, situated 80 miles northeast, draws much of the attention. In high school, Tucker and his friend Manjeri "Kris" Krishna started putting on shows, which Tucker continued to do as an undergraduate at University of Nevada, Las Vegas. When Tucker finished law school in 2005, Manjeri introduced him to a new artist he was working with: Austin-based blues-rockers Gary Clark Jr.

Soon, Tucker was serving as a "utility guy" for Clark, helping with everything from publishing legalese to day-to-day road management. After tours with Clark, Tucker eventually returned to San Antonio, providing legal services for local venues, purchasing 180-capacity club The Mix, and staging events including La Vilita's Día de los Muertos and the Maverick Music Festival, which ran from 2013 to 2017.

"What I'm hopeful for —



TEXAS MAVERICK: Blayne Tucker was a co-founder of the Maverick Music Festival, which ran for five years in San Antonio.

post-NIVA, post-COVID, post-Save Our Stages and all of that — is that there's a greater level of communication among independent promoters to work with smaller bands to enable them to have additional stops in their routing," Tucker says.

Tucker connected with VenuesNow to discuss what sets San Antonio apart, his various ventures, and the critical role he played in the passage of the Save Our Stages Act.

What differentiates San Antonio from other Texas markets?

You gotta look at it through a historic lens. The West Side Sound and the West Side of San Antonio was really the first part of the country where you had Latino, white, and black musicians playing together. There was a very vibrant, rich club life going on in San Antonio, and a very unique sound, where you had this amalgamation of the influence of the accordion (introduced by the German influx of immigrants that came in, then (the area) adopting

that sound, and making it its own, whether you have conjunto and tejano music. Long before Austin became what we know as the live music capital of the world, San Antonio was really the place where you would go to big shows. The Sex Pistols came there, U2, Jimi Hendrix, Ozzy Osbourne. ... Unfortunately, law enforcement in those days, San Antonio being the unique city that it is — over 65-70% Latino — law enforcement used big shows and concerts to discriminate against Latino music goers. We became a city that was very averse to diversity, and used enforcement of marijuana and those sorts of substances to discriminate and subjugate the Latinos in San Antonio. Getting into the late '70s and '80s, the city council in Austin began to be comprised of your more left-leaning, hippie types ... Austin then became a more open city that was friendly to the vibe and the nature of what it is to experience community at a concert and that sense of togetherness. In reality, most of the deeply steeped music

history in Central South Texas is out of San Antonio, if you dig deep enough.

What's your pitch for why artists should play San Antonio?

There's nothing cookie cutter about it. I mean, the history is where you sit. As a band — and I could speak to this as somebody that was himself on the road over 230 days out of the year — when you're in that kind of regimen, things sort of blur together. This is one of those stops along the way that you can't help but realize stand out, because there's just a unique sound, flavor, and experience to it all that you can't get anywhere else.

Why was getting involved with The Mix important to you?

It's been around since '97; I've owned it about five years. It was really the only consistent, long-standing, surviving music club (on) St. Mary's Strip, the entertainment district of San Antonio for live music where everybody comes and plays. The best part

about The Mix was that it brings in every kind and style of music over the years, everything from country to hip-hop to metal to rock, singer-songwriter, spoken word, you name it. It's open to everyone. And there's a long history of people throughout the city from every side of the socioeconomic spectrum – and I literally mean from billionaires to homeless people – feeling welcome in the place. The previous owner had just had enough. My partner Steve Mahoney, who owns several other bars in town, we looked at it as an institution that ought to be kept going for its own sake because of its collective historical significance, but also how we could make improvements with the stage and the sound and the lighting to have it be a place that people could continue to enjoy for years to come.

How did you assist NIVA's Congressional lobbying effort?

My role specifically was to get as many members' attention on the Texas delegation as possible. (I was) personalizing the story, but also just being very relentless. We work in a business that – I don't really take “no” as an answer. We won't stop. I knew we had a solid case to be made. (Senate minority whip and Save Our Stages co-sponsor John Cornyn) is a native San Antonio guy. He went to law school down there. Actually, his mother lived next door to my mother when my parents got divorced in San Antonio. ... What resonated with a lot of delegates on the Republican side was, you know, this isn't an arts and culture bailout or a hand-out. Early on, we started analogizing this to something under the Takings Clause of the Fifth Amendment – that when government comes and sort of shuts you down, they can't do that without some form of just compensation. ... That really seemed to resonate heavily with folks on that side of the aisle. They got that. Also, really educating them in terms of how our business works. It's not just having fun, having a good time, having a bunch of drinks. While it is all that, too, it's \$390 million in annual tax revenue in the state of Texas. It's over 200,000 jobs throughout the state, and those have a significant impact on the economy itself. ■

Austin

COTA COMPLEX LOOKS FORWARD TO BIG RACES AND BIG SHOWS

BY ROB KNAPP

AUSTIN, TEXAS, FANS and Bobby Epstein, CEO and chairman of the Circuit of the Americas, missed out on the big bang of a Rolling Stones concert in 2020.

The Stones were scheduled to play over Memorial Day weekend last year at the racetrack and entertainment complex, but COVID-19 intervened and Austin will have to wait a little longer for the band's concert. Makeup dates for the tour have not been announced.

That was in addition to the circuit's feature race, the annual Formula One United States Grand Prix, which was canceled in 2020 for the first

time since it was first run at COTA in 2012, hampered by the difficulty of getting drivers from around the world into the country during the pandemic.

In the meantime, the 1,500-acre complex – which in addition to a racetrack has an amphitheater, a 5,000-seat soccer stadium and a karting track – has stayed busy.

“The track books daily, and we still have more than 200 events on the calendar for this year,” Epstein said. “So whether it's on-track racing schools or car model launches that use meeting space and the Event Center as well as the track, there's still a lot of activity.”

The activity at 14,000-capacity Germania Insurance Amphitheater on the grounds was to start in August – at least the track's website said so in mid-February – but Epstein had some good news. “We actually just got clearance to start booking shows, just yesterday. And we have a couple of exciting announcements coming,” Epstein said. Those shows will begin at the end of April with limited capacity, but he couldn't share further details.

The big news for the track this year, aside from the return of Formula One in October, is the first visit by NASCAR. Tickets recently went on sale for the weekend of May 21-23, which will feature racing in the NASCAR Cup Series, the

Xfinity Series and the Camping World Truck Series.

“The fans from the time we opened have been expressing the desire to see NASCAR at COTA,” Epstein said. “I think one of the reasons is the track's interesting and challenging and fun for drivers, and the fan experience at COTA is very unique. So I think with the exciting on-track action as well as all the activities for the fans off track should make for a wonderful weekend.”

And when NASCAR arrives, there should be plenty of fans to welcome it, a big crowd for a COVID-era event.

“Our capacity is huge because we have general admission. We have 3 1/2 miles of the perimeter with hills and meadows you can see the track from, so you can wander around. So the capacity from that standpoint is very high,” Epstein said. “In the grandstand and reserve seating, capacities are still being determined as conditions continue to improve here. But your reserved seating, right now, if we were to have it today, would be probably in the 25,000 area, versus where I think we'll be in May, which is probably 35 (thousand) to 40,000 seats, if not more.”

Will Formula One fans turn out for NASCAR? “I'm not sure we'll see that much crossover,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 40



KEEPING TRACK: An aerial photo shows the Circuit of the Americas track with Bold Stadium and Germania Insurance Amphitheater at the center.

TOPSTOPS TEXAS

Ranked by tickets sold. Based on data from concerts and events Jan. 1-Dec. 31, 2020, as reported to Pollstar. Data updated as of Jan. 27.

RANK VENUE **TICKETS SOLD** **CAPACITY** **GROSS** **SHOWS**

MORE THAN 15,000 CAPACITY

1	American Airlines Center, Dallas	171,776	20,021	\$20,859,626	46
2	Toyota Center, Houston	102,264	18,000	\$17,721,293	9
3	Frank Erwin Center, Austin	31,534	16,800	\$3,258,728	3
4	AT&T Center, San Antonio	26,778	18,000	\$2,738,148	4
5	Alamodome, San Antonio	16,776	65,000	\$1,791,974	2

5,001-15,000 CAPACITY

1	Smart Financial Centre, Sugar Land	41,837	6,500	\$3,246,147	9
2	H-E-B Center, Cedar Park	34,802	8,700	\$2,381,208	24
3	Curtis Culwell Center, Garland	18,100	8,000	\$252,575	14
4	Ford Park Arena, Beaumont	9,538	8,500	\$363,158	3
5	American Bank Center, Corpus Christi	9,403	10,000	\$498,147	2

2,001-5,000 CAPACITY

1	Nutty Brown Amphitheatre, Austin	15,932	4,140	\$903,381	23
2	Austin City Limits Live at The Moody Theater, Austin	13,617	2,765	\$694,874	6
3	Bass Concert Hall, Austin	11,213	2,900	\$618,924	5
4	Revention Music Center, Houston	10,302	3,464	\$462,556	4
5	Dell Hall at The Long Center, Austin	7,086	2,442	\$467,662	4

2,000 OR LESS CAPACITY

1	Emo's, Austin	19,623	1,550	\$479,905	17
2	Wagner Noël Performing Arts Center, Midland	18,838	1,827	\$832,020	32
3	McAllen Performing Arts Center, McAllen	13,400	1,828	\$497,205	19
4	White Oak Music Hall, Houston	10,725	1,400	\$254,678	17
5	Scout Inn, Austin	8,029	1,000	\$186,113	10

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39

in that a large percentage of our Formula One buyers come in from out of town, out of state," he said.

"I think the local race fans will turn up," Epstein said. "And I think the same thing with (when) we have Moto GP," an international motorcycle racing circuit that the track hosts each year. "That's got a large Texas following. And I think that crowd will turn up for sure."

The complex recently made news when it brought on Elevate Sports Ventures to help sell premium seating, and Epstein talked about the new relationship.

"It works for us on two levels,"

he said. "One is not having regularly scheduled events, and we look at it as we're selling a few major, major events. And you need to be able to scale up your sales abilities for those big events. But then you have some downtime. And I think the partnership with Elevate's going to let us scale up when we need to and we need the support, but also not carry the load of a large room full of people when there's not so much to do."

With all the complex's acreage, plans are in the works for more attractions to draw people to the site year-round. "We only received our (Planned Unit Development) approval for development and zoning in the

fall," he said. "And that's going to allow us to really develop out the campus, everything from a garage condominium club on site to an industrial center."

That's when Epstein realized he'd left out the amusement park. (That happens when you have a lot going on.) "We're in the process of building out 'COTA Land,' the first amusement park in Austin," he said. "I can't believe I didn't even say that."

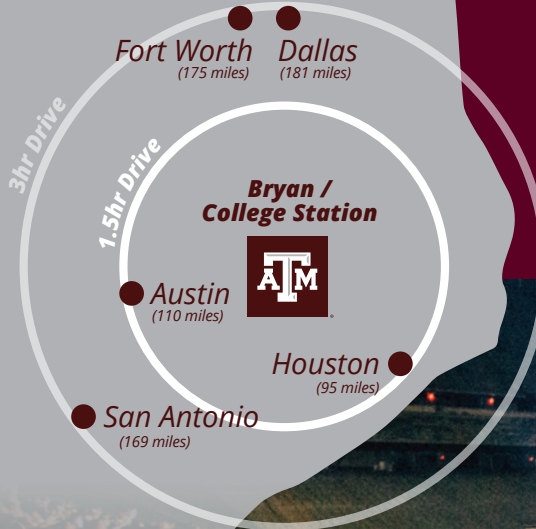
A children's park, which was previewed during the track's drive-through holiday light show, is first to open, and some thrill rides will join the karting track already on site. "We're putting in permanent rides and structures, shade structures and

making use of those parking lots, concession stands and restrooms at times that they otherwise would be sitting idle," Epstein said.

And then there are the Rolling Stones, whom Epstein looks forward to seeing play at COTA. Did he ever think he would be welcoming Mick and Keith to Austin?

"Never," he said with a laugh. "Never would I have thought that when I stood in Zilker Park in downtown Austin (in 2006) and watched from the very back of the crowd with probably 75,000 people and just enjoyed the show. Never thought I'd be a part of bringing a concert of that level to Austin." ▀

AGGIELAND DEEP IN THE HEART OF TEXAS



Bryan-College Station is located conveniently between five major Texas cities (87% of Texans) and is an ideal stop on any show's routed tour.

Boasting a local population of over **200,000 full-time residents** plus an additional population of another **60,000 students** each semester, makes Bryan-College Station the 14th largest city in the State of Texas (moving to a top 10 city when including the student body). Texas A&M University is a regular destination to over 50,000 season ticket holders for its various athletic events with cross-marketing opportunities for other non-athletic events.

KYLE FIELD

With a **102,000+ seat capacity**, Kyle Field is the **6th largest stadium in the world** and the **largest stadium in Texas**. The venue is home to the Texas A&M Aggie football team and also hosts other special events throughout the year. Kyle Field is the ideal location for **outdoor stadium concerts and large scale events**.

End Stage	Varies by setup
West Side Amphitheater	18,706 seats

REED ARENA

Prominently located on the Texas A&M University campus, Reed Arena hosts a variety of events including major touring concerts, family shows, private events, motorsports and comedy shows. It also serves as the home court for the Aggie men's and women's basketball teams and women's volleyball team.

360 Capacity	12,753 seats
Rodeo/Motorsport	10,910 seats
End Stage Capacity	9,375 seats
1/2 House Capacity	6,310 seats

12TH MAN FESTIVAL GROUNDS

Texas A&M has a variety of unique outdoor spaces for concerts and events. The most notable are the 6 & 13 acre grass fields located on the Northwest side of campus. These spaces are ideal for festival style events and other outdoor programming. We also have a 17 acre space ideally suited for large-scale outdoor events of any kind.

6 acres	18,000 capacity
13 acres	Varies by setup (custom)
17 acres	48,000 capacity

HOW TO TIE IT ALL TOGETHER:

Practicing The 'Black Art' Of Audio & Visual With Vanguardia

Vanguardia Director Jim Griffiths has been consulting venues and promoters on all things sound since 1985, when he worked on the Live Aid event at Wembley and Queen's legendary Knebworth concert, promoted by Harvey Goldsmith. It was a time when local authorities were eager to regulate and control live sound, with the backdrop that the live industry was developing increasingly powerful and efficient sound systems.

Griffiths got production and local authority representatives talking, to prevent venues across the country from being shut down for exceeding sound levels. He has since helped many of the UK's major stadiums get a license to host concerts and festivals. It was a logical next step to get involved in designing the acoustics for music venues and then designing sound systems that precisely match the venue architecture. The consultancy has now developed to the design of audio-visual (AV) systems and broadcast. He set up Vanguardia with several long-term colleagues some 15 years ago. Today, the company's long list of clients includes England's first fully configurable NFL stadium, Tottenham Stadium, the iconic Wembley and Twickenham stadiums, as well as a proposed new state-of-the-art music venue in London, and that's just in the UK.

Vanguardia also developed the full acoustic consultancy from the initial environmental and masterplanning studies through the bowl acoustics and sound systems design at the O2 Arena, London, which opened in 2007. "To be fair to the client, AEG, they wanted really good acoustics. Whenever there was value engineering, they retained [the budget] for acoustics. We designed the acoustics at the O2 differently as compared to the acoustics at other venues," Griffiths remembers. Bon Jovi, who played the opening concert at the arena in 2007, praised the acoustics live on stage.

The O2 put Vanguardia on the map internationally. "We're now getting projects worldwide by reputation," says Griffiths. Coca-Cola Arena in Dubai, Yas Arena in Abu Dhabi, Bercy Arena in Paris a number of stadia in Saudi Arabia for the World Cup, Arena Zagreb in Croatia, Sydney Stadium, as well as OVG's 23,500-capacity arena at the Etihad Campus in Manchester



are just a selection of projects, Vanguardia has been or is set to be working on.

One of the biggest commissions in company history came with the London Olympics in 2012, when Vanguardia designed the acoustics and sound for the Olympic Stadium and other venues such as the Copperbox and Velodrome. The company also oversaw the sound and acoustics of all the venues operating during the event. When the Olympic Stadium was converted into London Stadium, Vanguardia were consulted again.

"We describe ourselves as practitioners, we understand the way the stadium or the arena operate," says Griffiths.

He says that Vanguardia often gets commissioned post-construction to help run a successful venue, however, in the case of London's new Tottenham Stadium, Vanguardia was involved right from the start. "Daniel Levy, the chairman, was very committed to preserving the White Hart Lane atmosphere and said, 'I want this atmosphere to be intimidating,'" Griffiths recalls. "We discussed how we'd describe intimidating, and there's some important aspects: you don't have sizable gaps between the roof and the upper facade, because with big gaps, the sound escapes, which doesn't help generate a vibrant atmosphere. There is a risk also that the sound leakage can create environmental and noise pollution problems, too, and you lose the atmosphere." The careful design and focusing of the roof to generate atmosphere is also critical, he explains.



If you've ever been to Borussia Dortmund's stadium in Germany, you will have been intimidated by the so-called Yellow Wall, a single-tiered south stand for more than 20,000 of the club's most ardent supporters. Tottenham has something similar, the South Stand with no separation between upper and lower tiers, holding 17,500 people. The entire structure is held up by two steel trees – an architectural feat in the truest sense of the word, achieved by lead architects Populous, a trusted partner of Vanguardia. It's not just the largest single-tier stand in the UK; it also stands above an entire football pitch sliding in and out beneath it. Vanguardia used the latest sound analysis tool which included an acoustic camera, which comprised of over 70 microphones in an array, showing how the sound from the South Wall is reflected from the

roof at an angle to propagate and focus sound back over the pitch and players and then back to the away supporters in the opposite stand.

Once the architectural design is finalized, Griffiths starts looking at how the sound system can be used to enhance the event. Vanguardia defines four different grades of sound systems, from the basic PA/VA systems to a professional top-end production system. The latter allows bands to integrate with the house system to enhance the audio from a concert into the far reaches of the stadium. Griffiths liaises with sound rental companies and with Vanguardia's audio computer models, they work out the optimum system design for the bowl. The models show potential problem areas in terms of sound reflection causing echoes, and calculate the maximum noise levels, at which concerts can operate without violating sound level regulations in the community. So, when a client approaches Griffiths and his team and asks, 'what's the best sound system,' Griffiths goes, 'no idea, tell me what you want to do with it first, what's the budget?'

The owners of Tottenham Stadium knew they wanted to host concerts from the start. Vanguardia was told to select "the newest, the best" system for the job. "They decided to go for a sound system that wasn't even built. We went to LA, where they were being prototyped, and tested them," says Griffiths. The stadium had six concerts lined up in 2020, including Lady Gaga, Guns N' Roses, and the Capital Radio Summertime Ball, which might happen this year or next when things return back to normal. Concert proofing the building also prepped it for NFL sound requirements. "To host NFL, you need the right low-frequency punch. We've designed sub-bass units at the back of the speaker clusters, for that feel, that thud, that low-frequency energy that helps to generate the atmosphere. These speakers are able to produce this low frequency energy which has already been accepted by the NFL sound engineers during the first NFL events at Tottenham," explains Griffiths.

"The best" has its price, and while Griffiths won't push any venue to exceed their budget, he's a strong negotiator at the table, who'll say, "if you want it to sound like that, this is what you'll need. You've got to be tough. Sometimes you can't and I respect that when there are other

**Joe O'Herlihy, Jim Griffiths
and Mark Murphy**

important factors during a design, but it is important to hold your corner. I had a situation with a big stadium in London, which didn't get built in the end, where the architects said, 'we want to hear it but not see it.' This is not uncommon from some architects, but you have to hold out and say, 'this is not going to comply with the raft of regulations and operational requirements of a venue'."

It comes in handy that Vanguardia's technical sound director, Joe O'Herlihy, is the sound director of U2. He provides production advice as well, and as anyone knows, U2 tend to push the boundaries.

Vanguardia's full expertise will be needed, when venues and promoters try and negotiate exceptions with local regulatory authorities for this and next year's event season, when the main way to make up for last year's losses will be to host more events than would usually be permitted. Griffiths has negotiated exceptions, for the London Olympics in 2012, which were classed as an "extraordinary situation," and he will aim to do so again to "kick start the live music industry, as there are many artists wanting to tour with all the important support crew etc. also needing to work and survive from the current loss of income due to the pandemic. There is likely to be a requirement to do more days and more weekends to maximize revenue and cover infrastructure costs."

Griffiths has been using the forced downtime to work with several other acoustic consultants, a creative architect and designer, as well as a singer-songwriter, JJ Rosa, to set up the Events Revival Alliance. It has come up with an idea to facilitate interaction between performers and audience in times when live gigs are largely limited to online streams. In addition, the audiences are able to communicate with each other and help create the full atmosphere. Being acoustic experts, they focused on delivering a clear and authentic



feedback from fans to artist, just like during a live show – which is arguably the thing both artists and audiences miss most. Capturing fans cheering on their sofas, audiences interacting with each other and making it sound like tens of thousands were singing and cheering in unison is "the black art," says Griffiths. "The broadcast is mixed for the remote audiences and also separately mixed for the artists so that the optimum sound can be generating to provide a 'live' atmosphere."

JJ Rosa did a test run at the cinema in Ministry of Sound's offices in London. "She played a 40-minute set, and she was getting immediate feedback. She was seeing and hearing all of her family and friends. The first trial didn't go very well, the second test, everyone loved it," says Griffiths. The project, dubbed VAAR, has received some funding from the UK government, Innovate UK, and we are currently creating an app, OV8, and partnering with a streaming platform that will integrate the technology. It may prove particularly useful, when venues start reopening at limited capacity. "It may be a hybrid situation, where you'll be getting some interaction with a live audience, but the rest may be coming from thousands of other people, which you can see on screen and hear." According to Griffiths the technology would also work for sports, where audience sounds could be captured in their homes and be broadcast from each individual seat in the stadium.

Vanguardia added a AV component, which includes broadcasting, to its list of specialist services five years ago. Tottenham Stadium boasts 1,700 LED screens for providing information, messages and entertainment. Vanguardia's AV expert Mark Murphy recalls how the owners were very clear about wanting the first purpose-built NFL venue outside of North America. It meant that the visuals and overall production had been on par with what their U.S. colleagues have been cultivating over many years.

No other stadium in the UK features four screens in each corner. For a couple of hundred seats in the top tiers this means that the view is impeded. "So, we added screens on the back of the screens," Murphy explains. The spectators in the suites also got 60 reinforcement screens in total for the short bit between the suites and the bowl, when then they cannot yet see the big screens. As with the audio components, Vanguardia was working with the architects on the 3D model, looking at where things are in space, before moving in.

Murphy estimates that there are some 12 million pixels on screens in the bowl of Tottenham Stadium. For this kind of video display, you need a production system tying audio, video and lighting together, Murphy explains. "They've got a dedicated production studio, we call it the video gallery, similar to a TV production facility. You've got a dozen guys working in there on a match day,

controlling camera inputs, switching, trading live graphics, instant replay, content, timing and scoring, and also driving the IPTV system and routing all of the audio up to the audio control room," he continues.

"How do you actually tie it all together. You can spend a lot of money on your screens, on your loudspeakers, but it's being able to let your guys come in and play the instrument right. You need the buttons that your guys can press, to actually run everything together," says Murphy, who predicts that LED technology is going to become even more widespread with dropping price points and ways to display images outside the 16:9 camera format, but in much smaller unique shapes, too. It will create new options for sponsorship in particular and messaging in general.

While it's currently hard to imagine a time when people will be going out to live events as they used to, it's not in Griffiths' nature to dwell on any other question than how to improve the live experience for all involved. When live audiences gather again in large numbers, there'll still be problems to solve. Vanguardia is currently working on a system to predict the effect of sound propagation outside the venue due to varying wind conditions (speed and direction) based on Vanguardia's historical data. Lots of it. Changes in atmospheric conditions, temperature inversions, changes in wind directions all impact sound propagation significantly, which affects the level at which sound can be played inside the venue. "If we could predict this effect in advance, we could tell bands the likely on-site level to meet off-site limits as well as informing complainants in advance 'look the wind has changed, we haven't turned it up.' It's pretty important, because if you exceed licensed sound limits two things can happen: you could be fined for breaking the law, and at worse you could lose your license for staging music events at the venue.' And that would be something, no one working in this industry can afford right now.



Things continue to be quiet across the venue landscape as the live events industry continues to prepare for a comeback. Here are a few things we found happening in California.

San Mateo

EVENT CENTER HELPS COUNTY DURING PANDEMIC BY FILLING A HOST OF ROLES

BY JAMES ZOLTAK

LIKE MOST VENUES across the nation, the San Mateo (California) Event Center's regular business has felt the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, but that hasn't stopped CEO Dana Stoehr and her staff from stepping to the plate in the San Francisco Bay Area community's time of need.

Since March 2020, the 48-acre facility, home of the annual San Mateo County Fair and a host of other meetings, conventions, consumer and trade shows, and festivals, has served as a COVID-19 testing site, a shelter location for those who tested positive and could not shelter at home, a physically distanced jury service location, a wildfire evacuation center, a surge hospital, and most recently a drive-through COVID vaccination location.

"We have been as busy, if not busier, with the pandemic than we were before," Stoehr said.

The county, Stoehr said, has been "incredibly proactive" in its coronavirus response and right from the start turned to her and the event center for help.

"I remember it was something

like March 12 that the county manager called me and said how fast can you activate a mass testing site," she said.

The event center, 20 miles southeast of San Francisco, and all fairgrounds in California are designated as state Office of Emergency Services sites, to be activated in the case of large-scale emergencies.

Within 24 hours, the grounds' 100,000-square-foot Expo Hall was outfitted to accommodate drive-through COVID testing that stretched over several months, she said.

The county also rented recreational vehicles to house individuals who tested positive but could not safely shelter at home before that effort was shifted to a hotel, Stoehr said.

Another building, 55,000-square-foot Fiesta Hall, was converted into a surge hospital.

"The National Guard came in and set up a MASH unit and it became a surge hospital," she said. "When it became apparent they were able to take a breath and then figure out some other options to provide surge beds, we

flipped that over and activated the same building" for the collection, storage and distribution of personal protective equipment.

"Prices on the peninsula are very expensive and so we were able to offer (the county) lower than commercial rate, which helped us because we had a building rented," Stoehr said. "It's still stuffed with PPE. We were able to save the county money and my goal always (is) I don't want to make a profit in a pandemic. It's against my principles and it's against the board's principles. We just want to stay afloat and if we could do that and lower the costs for the spaces we're providing and keep people employed, that was my goal."

Next up for the event center was jury duty. The wheels of justice still had to turn but in as safe a way as possible. In this case, the event center's 25,000-square-foot off-track betting building and a nearby 16,000-square-foot exhibit hall were used to accommodate the jury pool. Jury service took place Monday through Thursday and off-track betting on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, Stoehr

said.

After the CZU Lightning Complex fires broke out in northern Santa Cruz and southern San Mateo counties in August, the event center was pressed into service as a shelter location and resource center, Stoehr said.

The center also staffed mobile units that did outreach testing in disadvantaged communities, an effort that continues today.

A walk-up vaccination site was established Jan. 30, in conjunction with Sutter/Palo Alto Medical Foundation, that should be able to accommodate 800 people an hour.

The drive-through vaccination location, launched Jan. 8, is one of the largest in the state along with Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles and Petco Park in San Diego.

Multiple health care providers and the county are administering vaccines at the drive-through location. Both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are being used.

One health care provider involved is storing the vaccine in one of the facility's kitchens.

Despite all the activity, the loss



BIG SHOTS: The drive-through vaccination location launched Jan. 8 at the San Mateo Event Center is one of the largest in California.



of revenue from the nonprofit center's usual events has taken its toll.

"We still had to cut back on staffing in June," Stoehr said.

Fairgrounds are uniquely positioned to provide some of the facilities needed to confront the pandemic, but some in California have not seen the kind of continuing capital improvements required to be as ready as San Mateo has been, said Stoehr, who is active in the International Association of Venue Managers, the Western Fairs Association and the International Association of Fairs and Expositions.

She hopes that will change, "with the attention and the importance of everybody that has come together from Cal Expo, to us, to Sonoma to Alameda County Fairgrounds — we step up in times of emergency, mostly for fire support.

"It's not just that we have the land and the buildings. We know where everything is. We have the supplies. We're ready to host you at all times. That, in and of itself, is a vast difference to walking into an empty warehouse somewhere." ▀

Glendale

ARTS GROUP MAKES ITS CASE TO REMAIN STEWARD OF HISTORIC THEATER

BY ROB KNAPP

LIKE OTHER NONPROFIT arts organizations, Glendale Arts is working harder than ever, as state COVID-19 restrictions prevent patrons from attending programming at the Alex Theatre, the 95-year-old city-owned theater that it has long operated.

So when the city of Glendale, after negotiating with the group on an extension of its agreement, decided to put out a request for proposals to manage the venue, it wasn't exactly what Elissa Glickman, CEO of Glendale Arts, wanted to hear. She said she understands the situation, though, as city governments are forced to put a magnifying glass to their finances in response to the economic interruption of the last year.

"Certainly it was ill-timed given the fact that we're in the middle of the pandemic," Glickman said. "But the city has worked with a single operator for over 25 years, and while we know that we're the best at what we do — and we've certainly increased the venue's prominence in both the live performance arena and in the last couple of years with film and TV — it's irresponsible of any municipality not to go out and see what else is out there."

Glendale Arts is responding to the RFP, which was released in December. All the proposals are due to the city in March and the city is scheduled to go public

LONG HISTORY: The Alex Theatre's 100-foot tower is a beacon in downtown Glendale.



with its decision in April, Glickman said.

The 1,411-seat Alex, which sits about 10 miles north of downtown Los Angeles, is home to the Los Angeles Ballet, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, the Gay Men's Chorus of LA, the Musical Theatre Guild and the Glendale Youth Orchestra, as well as the Alex Film Society. Resident companies account for 12% of the annual dates, Glickman said, "and then the remaining 200-plus days that we do are either one-off performances or again, whether it's dance or classical music or rock 'n' roll or film screenings, every day is a different day on the calendar. And then given our proximity to film and television, we do a lot of

TV for Showtime, Netflix, ABC, NBC, you name it."

The theater, known for its 100-foot art deco tower atop its marquee, showed Hollywood screenings and first-run movies until closing in the 1980s. In 1992, the Glendale Redevelopment Agency bought the theater and put \$6.2 million in public funds toward restoring it. In 1994, Glendale Arts, then known as the Alex Regional Theatre Board, took over management of the venue.

Beyond being a steward to a nearly century-old theater, Glickman said, the organization has worked to balance the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46

constituencies that it serves: the city, the taxpayers, donors, clients and patrons. “It’s not just putting money back in our pockets,” she said. “It’s how do we reinvest whatever dollars we do make, not only in the venue but back into the community.”

Regardless of the matters at hand, the group has plans for the theater that are coming online as soon as ... well, now.

A pre-pandemic proposal to Los Angeles County philanthropic organization The Ahmanson Foundation grew into a grant for a full-scale in-house livestreaming system that was on target to roll out in February. It provides “not only an opportunity to keep the venue active, but it would give our producers an opportunity to find new ways to monetize their show,” Glickman said.

“By going outside four walls, they can really take it to a much larger diaspora of arts appreciators,” she said. “And then it creates content. So we’re not just monetizing it in the immediate but you’re also providing opportunities for them to make money down the line.”

Also, the theater is moving to a new comprehensive customer relationship management system that will replace its ticketing system. “We really needed something that wouldn’t just sell a ticket,” Glickman said. “It would provide us with information on who our target buyers are, who our potential audiences are, and what revenue we’re not capturing. It being a customer relationship management solution, it gives us an opportunity to talk to the patron at each touch point.”

The decision on a provider is expected soon.

Meanwhile, Glendale Arts is making its case to the city that it is uniquely suited for the job of running the Alex.

“We feel very confident that there is no better fit for the Alex and for Glendale than the organization that bears its name, Glendale Arts. And we have a real vision for where we believe it can go with the city as our partner,” Glickman said.

“And,” she added, “we look forward to getting out of COVID so we can get back to work.”



San Diego

BRUTAL END: AN AWARD-WINNER GOES DOWN FOR GOOD

BY ROB KNAPP

SEASONS COME AND go, as do the stadiums and arenas where they’re played. And the time has come for San Diego Stadium to go. Demolition of the venue, which has also gone by Jack Murphy Stadium, Qualcomm Stadium and SDC-CU Stadium (and, for 10 days in 2011, Snapdragon Stadium)

since it opened in 1967, is well under way.

The stadium — home to the AFL and NFL’s Chargers 1967–2016, MLB’s Padres 1969–2003 and the NCAA’s San Diego Aztecs football program 1967–2019, along with three Super Bowls and two college football bowl games — was built in the brutalist architectural style, a blocky, muscular style that oftentimes featured surfaces of raw concrete.

Brutalism was popular at the time the stadium was designed, particularly for institutional projects such as government and university buildings and public housing. It was more popular in places such as the U.K. and Eastern Europe than the U.S., however, and it failed to make much of a dent in sports. Besides San Diego, it was seen mostly in other concrete multipurpose stadiums that popped up in Oakland, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia during the 1960s and early 1970s.

“San Diego Stadium was con-

sidered the best of its kind and won a national design award from the American Institute of Architects,” David Marshall, principal, architect and president of Heritage Architecture & Planning in San Diego, said in an email. “No other stadium had won that honor at that time.”

Gary Allen of the San Diego firm Frank L. Hope & Associates designed the stadium.

Marshall’s firm is no stranger to venue work in San Diego. Heritage consulted with Petco Park architects and advised them on how to preserve the Western Metal Supply Co. building when it was adapted into the ballpark, which opened in 2004.

It was also the associate architect on an award-winning \$26.5 million restoration of the Balboa Theatre that was completed in 2008.

In the case of the stadium, the city hired Heritage to assess the historic value of the structure. “We determined that it was historically significant and

CONCRETE GONE
A view of the concrete exterior of San Diego Stadium, then called Qualcomm Stadium, in 2006.

city staff agreed,” Marshall said. But in the end, San Diego State University chose to build a new home rather than put money into refurbishing the old place, taking out seats and adding amenities such as modern premium areas. The 35,000-seat Aztec Stadium will open adjacent to the site of the demolished stadium in 2022. Of the brutalist stadiums of the '60s and '70s, only the Oak-

land-Alameda County Coliseum is still standing.

The life cycle of venues continue to shorten, affected by rapidly changing technologies, shifts in tastes regarding premium seating and other factors. But Marshall says it doesn't have to be that way, citing upgrades that have kept the Rose Bowl and Arrowhead Stadium welcoming fans.

“The key to preserving any old building is keeping them

maintained and/or upgraded,” Marshall said. “This is the biggest fault of the city and SDSU in not realizing that the best solution was upgrading the stadium (new seats, scoreboard, sound system, etc.) instead of the colossal waste of demolishing a respected work of architecture. ... It would have been a different story if the stadium sat with no one using it, but San Diego Stadium had another 50+ years in it.” ▣

TOPSTOPS CALIFORNIA

Ranked by tickets sold. Based on data from concerts and events Jan. 1-Dec. 31, 2020, as reported to Pollstar. Data updated as of Jan. 27.

RANK	VENUE	TICKETS SOLD	CAPACITY	GROSS	SHOWS
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MORE THAN 15,000 CAPACITY

1	Forum, Inglewood	199,409	17,500	\$19,680,393	18
2	Golden 1 Center, Sacramento	137,381	17,500	\$5,870,258	21
3	Oakland Arena, Oakland	75,674	19,200	\$3,522,283	17
4	Save Mart Center, Fresno	52,625	16,000	\$3,588,943	7
5	Staples Center, Los Angeles	42,935	20,000	\$4,394,594	3

10,001-15,000 CAPACITY

1	Pechanga Arena, San Diego	65,496	14,000	\$3,128,416	13
2	Stockton Arena, Stockton	32,592	12,000	\$1,000,913	10
3	Toyota Arena, Ontario	11,523	12,000	\$916,901	2
4	Mechanics Bank Arena, Bakersfield	8,320	10,400	\$796,998	1
5	Viejas Arena, San Diego	6,873	12,200	\$545,351	1

5,001-10,000 CAPACITY

1	Bill Graham Civic Auditorium, San Francisco	58,335	8,500	\$3,395,577	7
2	Shrine Auditorium, Los Angeles	12,266	6,300	\$502,526	2
3	Microsoft Theater, Los Angeles	11,226	7,100	\$712,996	3

2,001-5,000 CAPACITY

1	Fox Theater, Oakland	32,469	2,800	\$1,506,429	14
2	Paramount Theatre, Oakland	17,260	3,040	\$1,031,807	7
3	Terrace Theater, Long Beach	16,805	3,051	\$1,298,331	6
4	San Jose Civic, San Jose	15,319	3,322	\$731,393	9
5	Harrah's Resort So. Calif., Events Center, Valley Center	8,220	3,250	\$494,827	5

2,000 OR LESS CAPACITY

1	City National Grove, Anaheim	38,515	1,700	\$2,082,035	41
2	Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts, Cerritos	19,104	1,800	\$1,538,945	21
3	The Independent, San Francisco	16,541	550	\$398,305	35
4	Troubadour, West Hollywood	14,959	500	\$344,579	35
5	Mary Stuart Rogers Theatre, Modesto	12,088	1,248	\$718,566	15

FRESHENING UP THE FIELDHOUSE

How a \$360M refurb will make Indy arena state of the art while keeping it retro

BY DON MURET

BANKERS LIFE FIELDHOUSE, the first retro-themed NBA arena, celebrates the rich heritage of basketball in the state of Indiana.

More than 20 years after the venue opened in downtown Indianapolis, it's going through a major facelift to retain its distinction for future generations.

The 18,000-seat arena, home to the NBA's Indiana Pacers, was originally designed by the old Ellerbe Becket. It opened as Conseco Fieldhouse in November 1999 with lots of brick, a curved roofline and a tight seating bowl, all features of old gyms dotting the Hoosier State.

The venue's original price tag was \$185 million. As the building approaches 25 years old, sports architect Populous designed comprehensive upgrades for the "Fieldhouse of the Future" at a cost of \$360 million, effectively doubling the initial budget.

The total project, to be completed in 2022, stands among the most expensive renovations of a big league arena, apart from Madison Square Garden. That was a \$1 billion transformation of a venue that opened in 1968.

Under the agreement funding the Bankers Life Fieldhouse renovation that was signed in 2017, arena owner the Capital Improvement Board is providing \$270 million toward the renovation, with the city contributing \$25 million.

The Pacers have committed \$65 million to the project and signed a 25-year lease extension.

Rick Fuson, president and chief operating officer of Pacers Sports & Entertainment, has been with the team for 37 years and was part of the original group developing the arena in the late 1990s.

"We've said for all these years that the building had good bones," Fuson said. "We never thought we would have to tear it down like we did Market Square Arena and the RCA Dome, and other buildings across the country."

Herb and Mel Simon, brothers and mall developers, bought the Pacers in 1983. Mel died in 2009. Herb, now 86, wanted to make sure the team remained a long-term fixture in town, which

helped drive the effort to get a deal done to fund the renovations, Fuson said.

"Basically, all Herb really wanted was to make sure there was a place for the Pacers to play that would be state of the art moving forward," he said. "I never thought it could be better, but it's a new building and one for the future."

FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

It all started in 2017 with support spaces connecting to the arena campus.

The Ascension St. Vincent Center, a new practice facility for the Pacers, opened that year across the street from the arena. The Simon family spent \$53 million to build it. The 130,000-square-foot building extends to public medi-

cal facilities on the top two floors of the five-story building.

A few years earlier, the Pacers started mapping out a three-phase arena renovation to expand premium seat offerings, retrofit the center-hung videoboard with new LED technology, install new cushioned seats in the bowl, create new social spaces in the upper deck and build an outdoor plaza for ice skating, sunrise yoga and live entertainment.

As part of their research, the Pacers visited several arenas and stadiums to get ideas for improving Bankers Life Fieldhouse. They toured new NBA venues Golden 1 Center, Fiserv Forum and Chase Center, in addition to State Farm Arena, TD Garden and Wells Fargo Center, three buildings that went through extensive refurbishments.



COURTESY INDIANA PACERS (X2)

BANK PLAZA: The addition of a plaza for year-round use is part of arena renovations.





BRICK HOUSE: Suite renovations stay true to the arena's retro theme.

They also went to Wrigley Field, a three-hour drive northwest of Indianapolis. The Chicago Cubs spent \$760 million to refresh a century-old ballpark without altering the classic seating bowl, its best asset. Adam Stover, a senior principal with Populous, worked on Wrigley and serves as lead architect for Bankers Life Fieldhouse upgrades.

"Our intent when we embarked on this project was to make what is a fantastic building even better; not to take any steps back, but to modernize where we could," said Mel Raines, the Pacers' executive vice president of corporate communications, community engagement and facilities operations. "We wanted to keep the fieldhouse charm and everything about it that people love, but enhance it."

The arena's compact seating rake remains mostly intact with the exception of the north end, where new retractable seats were installed at stage end, which changed the geometry a bit, Stover said. The new gray seats replace the old forest green color scheme.

As part of renovating the suites, all 52 units will have one exposed brick wall to keep that old-timey feel, Raines said.

The two new event-level clubs that are part of the recently completed first phase provide other examples of the effort to keep

the original design theme intact while improving the fan experience.

"The character of the building, the integration of the brick, the 'Hoosier Hysteria' everybody talks about, it's got a feel that's very Indiana," Stover said. "It's important as we go about renovating and repurposing that story to expand on it through the arena."

The 67 Club, named after 1967, the year the Pacers were founded as an American Basketball Association franchise, is situated along the east side. The walls were built with reclaimed brick from an old building in Chicago matching the original brick on the arena's facade and interior.

A similar process was done for the American Airlines 1914 Club, Wrigley Field's home plate lounge, Stover said.

A mosaic wall inside the 67 Club, with 4,450 square feet of hospitality space, honors the state fairgrounds coliseum in Indianapolis, where the Pacers first played. A quote embedded on a mirror behind the bar pays homage to Bobby "Slick" Leonard. Leonard, a former NBA player, coached the Pacers to three ABA titles and was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 2014.

On the west side is the new PointsBet Hardwood Club, slightly smaller at 4,000 square feet, named for a sports betting outlet. A signature design element is the old floor from Market Square Arena framing multiple LED screens

CONTINUED ON PAGE 50



GETTY IMAGES

HOOSIER DADDY: Will Hinkle Fieldhouse, a filming location for "Hoosiers," be the site of more upsets in the NCAA Tournament?

INDIANA PREPARES FOR A NEW KIND OF MADNESS

Indiana has cornered the market on March Madness this year. Because of the pandemic, the entire NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament will be held in the Hoosier State.

Lucas Oil Stadium, the home of the NFL's Indianapolis Colts, will play host to the Elite Eight and Final Four.

In addition, five arenas will hold tournament games over the next four weeks: Bankers Life Fieldhouse; Butler University's Hinkle Fieldhouse, where parts of the classic movie "Hoosiers" was filmed; Indiana Farmers Coliseum on the state fairgrounds; Purdue's Mackey Arena in West Lafayette; and Indiana's Simon Skjold Assembly Hall in Bloomington.

It's hoops heaven personified. Indianapolis alone has 100 college basketball games booked in March, more than 30 set for Bankers Life Fieldhouse, according to Mel Raines, the Indiana Pacers' executive vice president of corporate communications, community engagement and facilities operations. The men's Big Ten tournament will take place at Lucas Oil Stadium, and the women will play at Bankers Life Fieldhouse. The boys state high school tourney was moved to April to accommodate college play, Raines said.

The Indiana Convention Center,

attached to the stadium, will have 12 basketball courts for practices during the NCAA tournament. It all starts with Selection Sunday on March 14 and ends with the title game April 5.

The NCAA announced that in conjunction with the county health departments it had decided to allow a capacity of up to 25% at tournament games.

The Pacers also have to contend with the second half of the NBA season, Raines said. As of Feb. 16, those dates had not been released. The Pacers are now allowing up to 2,000 fans in attendance for NBA games.

The city and state are ready, though. Indianapolis is home to NCAA headquarters, and Bankers Life Fieldhouse and Lucas Oil Stadium are accustomed to holding large events tied to Final Fours and Super Bowls taking place downtown.

Raines and fellow Pacers executives Rick Fuson and Todd Taylor sit on boards of civic groups working with the NCAA to handle event logistics that extend to lodging and the beautification of downtown Indianapolis as part of the big welcome.

"We were able to survive last year with the cancellation of the Big Ten tournament and a lot of other things," Fuson said. "When the NCAA decided they wanted to do a bubble, Indianapolis was at the top of the list. We switched the NBA All-Star Game from this year to 2024, so we're able to bring in a lot of those people to help out as well."

The Pacers are grateful to NCAA officials such as Dan Gavitt, senior vice president of basketball, and JoAn Scott, managing director of men's basketball championships, as well as NCAA President Mark Emmert, for making it happen, Fuson said.

"We're going to show the world that we can do it," Fuson said. ▣

—Don Muret



BOARD OF APPEAL: ANC Sports upgraded the Pacers' center-hung.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 49

stretching 318 feet along one wall.

"One of the coolest features is if you look up under where the precast would be for the seating rise, it looks like you're sitting under an old gymnasium," said Todd Taylor, the Pacers' senior vice president and chief sales and marketing officer. "You can see the underside of the seats."

Both clubs serve 600 seats along the respective sidelines. Because of COVID-19, they won't open until the start of the 2021-22 season.

The two new clubs were driven by the need for additional high-end hospitality spaces, taken from data supplied by consultant CSL International, Taylor said.

"What we heard loud and clear from all of our research was that flexibility and options are what the consumer wants," Taylor said.

Before the renovation, the arena had one event-level club serving 1,500 seats in the first seven rows circling the court. The Pacers moved some storage areas and relocated the WNBA Indiana Fever's practice court one floor above to a premium level, which helped free space for the new clubs, Stover said.

The original courtside club was also remodeled.

FOUR BY FOUR

Apart from the new clubs, the

Pacers are building more loge boxes and theater boxes to meet consumer demand two years after introducing the Lexus Lofts, a similar four-seat hybrid product midlevel in the bowl.

Similar to other big league markets, those four-seat groupings sold out almost immediately to companies that can't afford to buy a full suite but still want to entertain clients in a premium environment, Taylor said.

Sixteen new loge boxes are being constructed in the lower bowl across both end zones, fewer than 20 rows from the court. The eight built behind the stage sold for basketball only will open this month in time for the onslaught of college and high school hoops tournaments, Taylor said.

The new inventory, designed with counter space, roller chairs and small televisions, sells for \$60,000 to \$100,000 annually depending on the length of term, location and events, he said.

The Pacers will start marketing the loge boxes and theater boxes soon at their preview center in the practice facility.

"Because of the pandemic and us not having games (last fall), we were actually able to start bringing people through the building and giving them live tours," Taylor said. "We started to tease the (loge) concept, but because they're not finished yet, we haven't started that tour."

The second phase of construc-



tion officially starts this month, to include renovating suites and creating new standing room areas attached to bars on the north and south ends.

At the north end, where the stage is set up for concerts, a new vomitory was "punched" in the bowl that connects to the entry pavilion on the concourse, providing views into the bowl and a full view of the revamped center-hung.

On the west side, seven rows of seats will be removed in the upper deck to build a two-tiered standing platform, catering to the younger generation.

Those hangouts, some of which will be ticketed spaces, were inspired by Golden 1 Center's Sierra Nevada Draught House and Fiserv Forum's Panorama Club, public gathering spaces at the top of those two NBA venues, according to Fuson and Taylor.

Taylor spent six years in Major League Baseball working for the Texas Rangers and Milwaukee Brewers and drew from that experience and feedback from his own "focus group" of three teenage children to help form the new standing room spaces at Bankers Life Fieldhouse.

"In some ways, arenas are becoming more like the outdoor venues," Taylor said.

"If you think about a baseball game, a bunch of us might find ourselves going to the ballpark whether we're fans or not, because we can buy a fairly cheap ticket, hot dog and a beer and leave after a few innings," he said. "Arena sports typically weren't built that way, but these new spaces, especially the higher up they are, allow for more of a party atmosphere. You want to congregate with friends and have

some flexibility. When we look at our next generation of fans, that's what they're looking for."

FINISHING TOUCHES

The outdoor plaza is part of the third phase; the removal of a parking garage starts this month to clear space for the new addition. The skating rink activated in the winter will be a little bigger than Rockefeller Plaza in New York, Raines said.

Across sports, plazas are a big trend as teams develop year-round spaces outside their venues to generate revenue and activities for the local community. In Chicago, Gallagher Way, a green space that's part of the Wrigley Field makeover, is converted to a skating rink in the winter.

At Bankers Life Fieldhouse, the updated center-hung is equipped with the crispest LED technology, including a 10-foot-high screen on the board's underbelly. ANC Sports developed the software for the center-hung structure like it did for the older version in 2012.

The videoboard was initially part of phase three but after the pandemic hit and the start of the 2020-21 NBA season was delayed until December, it gave the Pacers extra time to renovate the board, Raines said.

Before the pandemic, the Pacers installed Appetize mobile point-of-sale for food and retail operations and were gradually moving to cashless before COVID-19 expedited the transition. The arena has reverse ATM machines to distribute debit cards for those patrons that use cash.

Since December, when fans were first allowed back in the arena for events including Pacers games, those machines are averaging 80 transactions among



HOT MARKET: The 67 Club features pieces of the floor from old Market Square Arena framing LED screens.

crowds restricted to 2,000 people. Usage is higher than expected, Raines said.

Touchless systems extend to the men's and women's restrooms at Bankers Life Fieldhouse, where new team sponsor Sloan Valve Co. of Chicago has converted those fixtures, Fuson said.

The pandemic has not greatly affected the project except for a few supply chain issues, Fuson said. Many Pacers employees now work remotely, resulting in smoother navigation of construction schedules given increased safety protocols to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

"We got lucky," he said.

Apart from the renovations, the Pacers have reentered the market for a new naming rights partner to replace Bankers Life after the insurance firm did not renew its deal that expired in June 2019. The team is working on a new agreement internally after initially working with consultant Van Wagner three years ago to find a new partner.

"We see companies start to talk again about major expenditures as they have saved some money over the last several months," Fuson said. "We look forward to (signing an agreement) sometime in the future. I'm confident we'll have a deal done at some point." ▀



ARENA SALUTES HALL OF FAMER IRVING AZOFF

IRVING AZOFF'S VICTORY lap is in full swing a few months after he was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Pacers Sports & Entertainment has named the new backstage production space at Bankers Life Fieldhouse after the music industry kingpin.

The ILA Star Compound, the official title, uses Azoff's initials. The 5,000-square-foot space encompasses six dressing rooms, an artist lounge and three event offices. It's part of the first phase completed for a \$360 million renovation of the Indianapolis arena.

Christian rock act TobyMac will be the first concert performer to use the compound when he plays a Feb. 25 show at Bankers Life Fieldhouse. Pacers Sports expected a crowd of about 3,000 to attend under capacity restrictions.

The compound's name was driven by the NBA team, which wanted to honor Azoff after his rock hall induction. Azoff, head of Front Line Management and co-founder of Oak View Group, owner of VenuesNow and Pollstar, has a long history of booking bands in Indianapolis and counts Pacers owner Herb Simon as a friend.

Soon after the 2020 inductees were announced in January of last year, arena officials discussed internally how they could honor

Azoff beyond the typical things such as presenting concert memorabilia, said Mel Raines, the Pacers' executive vice president of corporate communications, community engagement and facilities operations.

Putting Azoff's name on the compound, which was in the process of being relocated and upgraded to better accommodate touring artists, "bubbled up" to the surface and it was the idea they liked best, Raines said.

Rick Fuson, Pacers Sports & Entertainment president and chief operating officer, called Azoff about the concept. Azoff was honored and approved the idea.

"How could I say no?" Azoff said. "Rick Fuson is one of the great presidents of an arena. They know what they're doing. They're so artist friendly. They get the dates you want even if you say you need a Saturday and they have to fight with the NBA to get it."

Azoff said he has a soft spot in his heart for Indianapolis.

He grew up in Danville, Illinois, a 90-minute drive west of Indy on Interstate 74. The old Market Square Arena, where the Pacers played from 1974 to 1999, was a frequent stop for Midwest-born acts such as REO Speedwagon, which Azoff managed back in the '70s.

Azoff's first booking in Indy was the old Sherwood Country Club, which formed a teenage dance club back in the 1960s. The James Gang played there. It was the first time Azoff met the

INDIANAPOLIS STAR: The star compound's sign uses Irving Azoff's initials.

band's Joe Walsh, who would later join the Eagles, Azoff's longest-running client for more than 45 years. The country club was destroyed by fire in 1991 and the land was sold for a condominium development.

At Bankers Life Fieldhouse, the new compound moved from the east side to the north end, steps away from the stage and loading dock. The Pacers consulted with Live Nation to help design the space and added an artist lounge late in the development, Raines said.

"We were able to make some adjustments to the compound when we shut down for COVID as construction was starting," she said. "We made sure we had all touchless restrooms and improved air filtration."

As part of the compound, the Pacers included a nice touch by adding a wall with pieces of the basketball floor from Market Square Arena for artists to sign as they perform in the building. (The arena's new PointsBet Hardwood Club also features pieces of the old floor.)

Azoff has some expertise designing backstage spaces. Years ago, his wife, Shelli, worked closely with their business partner, Madison Square Garden Chairman Jim Dolan, to redevelop the star dressing rooms at the Forum in Inglewood, California. MSG owned the Forum for eight years before selling it in May.

"That backstage experience kind of became the standard by which everybody else is judged when we tour the world," Azoff said. "If we ever get concerts back with 100% capacity, I hope the first show at Bankers Life Fieldhouse is mine and I'll try to make it happen." ▀

— Don Muret

HOME OF THE STARS: The artist lounge in the ILA Star Compound at Bankers Life Arena.



BOOKINGS

Todd Rundgren Brings Concerts Back Home

How a rock cult hero is putting some local flavor into a new virtual tour

BY DEBORAH SPEER

TODD RUNDGREN WAS feeling a tad bit antsy before departing his home in Kauai, Hawaii, for Chicago in early February.

"We're all excited and a little concerned," Rundgren said. "Like, this flight to Chicago will be the first flight that I will be on in a year."

The reason for the COVID-be-damned flight to the Windy City was to begin rehearsals for a unique, 25-date "Clearly Human" virtual tour, produced by streaming concert production and ticketing platform NoCap, that launched Feb. 14.

Rundgren acknowledges that despite COVID-19 still raging, he's eager to perform after nearly two years off the road. His band and crew need to get back to work. The fans need engagement.

As famous as a tech early adopter and for coloring outside the lines as for his music, Rundgren went to work on a solution to the involuntary isolation that safely replicates touring to "visit" cities around the country without leaving a central location.

"Clearly Human" may be the first digital tour of its kind for Rundgren, but it's not his first time at the livestreaming rodeo.

With his background in computer programming, Rundgren briefly considered the field after leaving his first band, Nazz, in 1969. He decided to dive into record producing instead, but the lure of technology never left him.

"We did our first live streaming concert on the internet in 2002," manager Eric Gardner of Panacea Entertainment says. "We made a practice in the '70s of selecting one show on every tour and shooting it for home video purposes and also for licensing to television."

The "Clearly Human" tour updates the

digital concert model by putting Rundgren, his band and crew back to work for a couple of months and gives fans an opportunity to experience a unique, full-production live show that, while not in person, has a local flavor.

The tour, which kicked off with a Buffalo, New York, show, employs geofencing technology and NoCap's platform to create a "venue" that allows fans in specific regions (and beyond, with VIP and multicity ticket packages) to view a show that promises to be different from a typical livestream. Geofencing provides a virtual perimeter around a real-world geographic area or, in this case, market. Single-show tickets cost \$35, five-show passes are \$149 and an all-access pass for the whole tour was available as the tour began for \$700.

Initially, ticket sales were restricted to residents of the 25 markets being targeted. But demand was such that Rundgren and NoCap chose to relax geofencing so residents outside of markets are directed to the virtual performance "in" the city nearest their ZIP code.

While many artists have livestreamed concerts during the pandemic lockout, which marks its one-year anniversary in March, they've been streamed from venues or soundstages to essentially a single, global market.

Rundgren wanted a different energy that not only sounded but felt like a physical tour.


"You put your all into one show and hope that show is worth the effort," Rundgren says. "But that's not what touring is about. It's about adapting the show to the place that you're at and the localities you're in."

He acknowledges that the "mood" of each show is slightly different and that they tend to improve as the group finds its groove.

"That's why we want to do 25 shows. We expect that things are going to get better," Rundgren says. "They are going to get more nuanced. We're going to understand the material. So it helps us do our best."

Rundgren has devised ways for creating that localized "head space" for himself and the band by changing the physical environment of the Chicago space for each city on the tour, redecorating backstage areas and even changing up the food.

"Everything in the venue will be localized," Rundgren says. "The backstage area will be festooned with posters and sports memorabilia from the town we're playing and, if at all possible, we'll get food sent in from a local eatery. And if not, we'll try to get the recipes and we'll make it ourselves."

A limited number of tickets — 19, according to the nocapshows.com site — are priced at \$287.50 apiece for each socially distanced show at the undisclosed Chicago location. 

A longer version of this story originally ran in Pollstar.



STEPPING OUT: Todd Rundgren has developed a legion of die-hard fans who'll follow him anywhere. With his digital "Clearly Human" tour, they can follow him from anywhere.

BOOKINGS

LIVE! LANDMARKS

RODEOHOUSTON, A YEARLY HIGHLIGHT, WILL RETURN FOR 90TH YEAR IN 2022

ONE OF AMERICA'S largest live entertainment events every year is the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, or RodeoHouston, as it was officially named in 1996. The event features major concert entertainment along with rodeo competitions and other activities and attractions staged in the country's fourth-largest city. In past years it has traditionally occurred for about three weeks during the first quarter of the year, typically beginning in late February or March. It is one of the first large-scale live events of the year in North America.

However, with the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic during the past year, the 2021 rodeo is the first one in 84 years to be canceled in its entirety. There were earlier plans to postpone it until May, but on Feb. 3, an announcement was made that it was canceled outright. It is only the second complete cancellation in the 89 years since the rodeo began, the last being in 1937 after the original site, Sam Houston Hall, had burned

down. Sam Houston Coliseum was set as the new home when the event resumed in 1938. Next year's event will mark the rodeo's 90th anniversary.

Last year's 20-day stretch of RodeoHouston, which kicked off March 3, was one of the earliest live entertainment events in North America to be affected by the novel coronavirus. Local government officials ordered it closed nine days into the run, with all the remaining concerts canceled in response to the health emergency.

But before the pandemic, indeed during most of the last century, the Houston rodeo has provided a stage for some of the concert industry's top stars — beginning with Gene Autry, who gave the first superstar performance in 1942. In the years since “The Singing Cowboy” made his appearance at the Houston Fat Stock Show, as it was originally named, the country music genre has been the most represented among the landmark concerts at the rodeo in past decades.

In 1966, the Astrodome became the home of the event for 36 years until George Strait headlined the rodeo's final concert there in 2002. That finale on March 3 saw 68,266 tickets sold, breaking all attendance records for a concert at the Houston stadium — dubbed the “Eighth Wonder of the World” when it opened. The following year the rodeo moved to its current home, NRG Stadium (originally Reliant Stadium).

Strait is one of the artists with the most box-office data recorded in the archives. The “King of Country” has performed a total of 30 times at RodeoHouston — from his first appearance in 1984 through the most recent one on March 17, 2019, according to statements released by the rodeo. From all of his shows, overall attendance tops 1.7 million.

At the 2019 concert, he set an attendance record of 80,108 at NRG Stadium. That per-

formance featured opening sets by Robert Earl Keen and Lyle Lovett and logged a gross of \$12.7 million. The ticket count smashed his own attendance record at a 2013 appearance, when 80,020 seats were sold.

Reba McEntire is also one of the country superstars with a considerable number of repeat appearances at the event. She also has the record for the most tickets sold for a multiple-show stint, according to reported sales data. Total attendance from her appearance at the Astrodome in March 1996 hit 174,300 from three performances with a gross listed at \$2.1 million, about \$3.5 million in today's dollars.

Houston's own Clint Black also has a three-show run at the Astrodome stored in the archives. His engagement came during the rodeo's 1992 event. The ticket count totaled 170,803, and all three performances that year were sold out. He also appeared the following year along with Wynonna Judd in the early years of her solo career. Together they moved 107,737 tickets at two concerts, and later in 1993, released a duet together and toured during the summer.

Among other reports of two-show stints at the Astrodome, Garth Brooks tops that category with a sold ticket count of 125,204 for his performances in February 1993. His concerts earned \$1.3 million (\$2.3 million today). Note: Since 2003, no two-show engagements for the rodeo have been reported and included in the archives for NRG Stadium.

Although country music artists may account for the majority of headliners who appear at RodeoHouston, other genres are also represented among historical concert draws. The archives include concerts by Styx (2013), Mary J. Blige (2013), ZZ Top (2007), Neil Diamond (2002), Lynyrd Skynyrd (1996), Patti LaBelle (1992) and Huey Lewis and the News (1992).

Among these artists, ZZ Top drew the largest crowd, 70,014 at NRG Stadium on March 18, 2007, with a gross (adjusted for inflation) of \$2.4 million. Mary J. Blige produced the top gross of \$3.7 million (2021 value) for her single performance March 1, 2013. Her ticket count was 66,322.

Neil Diamond and Lynyrd Skynyrd also top the \$1 million threshold in today's dollars, with \$1.3 million and \$1.2 million, respectively. Ticket counts were 53,324 for Diamond and 58,000 for Skynyrd.

RodeoHouston also has special days on the schedule each year, including Go Tejano Day, which has been a part of the rodeo for decades. The most recent performance was March 10, 2019, and featured Los Tigres Del Norte and an attendance tally of 75,586.

Black Heritage Day is also included on the schedule annually. Cardi B headed up the slate of performers at the most recent event March 1, 2019. The ticket count for that performance was just six less than the Go Tejano Day tally the same year. ■ —Bob Allen

SADDLE UP: Beyoncé arrives on horseback for her 2004 RodeoHouston performance.



LIVE! ROUNDUP

PUNCHING IT UP: A BIG BOUT IN BIG D

"BOXING CAPITAL OF the World" may not stick as the new moniker for Texas, but American Airlines Center in Dallas has hosted only the second boxing event with fans in the U.S. reported during the COVID-19 era. The first, a Premier Boxing Champions Fight Night at the Alamodome in San Antonio, drew a crowd of 9,024 on Oct. 31.

The Dallas event, produced by Golden Boy Promotions, earns the No. 1 ranking on Hot Tickets and occurred on Jan. 2 with 4,218 boxing fans in attendance. Ticket revenue topped out at \$353,835. In the main event, Ryan Garcia defeated Luke Campbell for the World Boxing Council interim lightweight title.

On the other side of the live entertainment spectrum, three orchestral events land on the chart, two of them at Holland Performing Arts Center's Peter Kiewit Concert Hall in Omaha, Nebraska, and one at Wagner Noël Performing Arts Center in Midland, Texas.

The Omaha Symphony Orchestra kicked off its 2021 centennial season Jan. 15-16 with works by Ralph Vaughan Williams and Antonín Dvorák, drawing 368 attendees for both nights. It is No. 12 with \$15,371 in sales. On Jan. 30-31, the orchestra's Symphony Pops Series featured "The Paul Simon Songbook" with 370 tickets sold and a gross of \$18,945 to rank eighth.

The Midland Odessa Symphony and Chorale's Masterworks series is No. 14 with its "Mostly Mozart" concert on Jan. 30 that logged a ticket count of 653. **A** — Bob Allen

HOTTICKETS MARCH 2021

Ranked by gross. All data based on figures supplied to Pollstar. Date range 1/1/21-1/31/21. Data updated as of 2/12/21.

RANK	GROSS	EVENT	VENUE	ATTENDEES	PROMOTER	DATE	SHOWS
1	\$353,835	Golden Boy Presents: Garcia vs. Campbell	American Airlines Center, Dallas	4,218	Golden Boy Promotions	Jan. 2	1
2	\$55,169	Air Supply	Florida Theatre, Jacksonville	702	In-house	Jan. 31	1
3	\$41,285	Ben Allen	Hertz Arena, Estero, Fla.	2,057	In-house	Jan. 9	1
4	\$37,073	Brian Regan	Florida Theatre, Jacksonville	758	In-house	Jan. 23	1
5	\$30,733	Mitchell Tenpenny	Cotton Eyed Joe, Knoxville, Tenn.	1,280	West Entertainment	Jan. 23	1
6	\$27,881	Jim Breuer	The Vogel, Red Bank, N.J.	573	In-house, The Basie Presents	Jan. 15-16	4
7	\$21,870	Read Southall	Twisted J Live, Stephenville, Texas	996	In-house	Jan. 16	1
8	\$18,945	Omaha Symphony Orchestra	Peter Kiewit Concert Hall, Omaha, Neb.	370	In-house	Jan. 30-31	2
9	\$18,510	Read Southall	Heritage Hall, Ardmore, Okla.	588	In-house	Jan. 23	1
10	\$18,110	Rob Schneider	Capitol Theatre, Clearwater, Fla.	279	Ruth Eckerd Hall Presents	Jan. 23	1
11	\$17,062	Sister Hazel	Florida Theatre, Jacksonville	481	In-house	Jan. 16	1
12	\$15,371	Omaha Symphony Orchestra	Peter Kiewit Concert Hall, Omaha, Neb.	368	In-house	Jan. 15-16	2
13	\$14,060	Read Southall	Rusty Bucket BBQ and Tavern, Midland, Texas	358	In-house	Jan. 2	1
14	\$13,214	Midland-Odessa Symphony & Chorale	Wagner Noël Performing Arts Center, Midland, Texas	653	Midland-Odessa Symphony & Chorale	Jan. 30	1
15	\$11,998	Eaglemania: World's Greatest Eagles Trib. Bnd	Mayo Performing Arts Center, Morristown, N.J.	223	In-house	Jan. 23	2
16	\$11,368	Tusk: World's No. 1 Trib. to Fleetwood Mac	Capitol Theatre, Clearwater, Fla.	233	Ruth Eckerd Hall Presents	Jan. 15	1
17	\$11,046	Rumours - A Fleetwood Mac Tribute	Club LA, Destin, Fla.	435	In-house	Jan. 22-23	2
18	\$10,865	Read Southall	Hurricane Harry's, College Station, Texas	406	In-house	Jan. 15	1
19	\$9,358	Annual Elvis Birthday Bash	Count Basie Center for the Arts, Red Bank, N.J.	182	In-house, The Basie Presents	Jan. 29-30	2
20	\$8,342	Interstellar Echoes - Tribute to Pink Floyd	Club LA, Destin, Fla.	327	In-house	Jan. 15-16	2

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