

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,

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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
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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	Scoot Inn, Austin	8,029	1,000	\$186,113	10

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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."

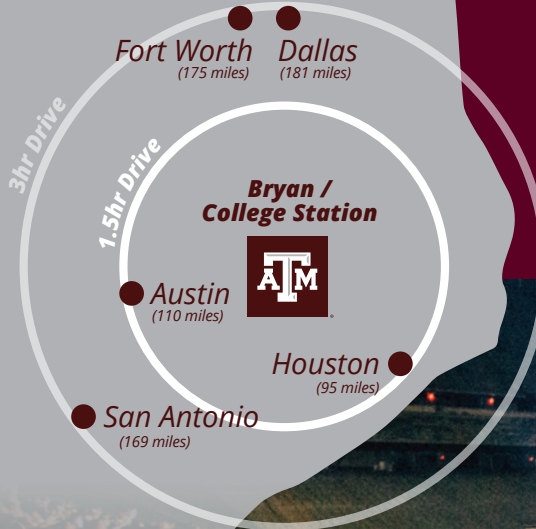
A children's park, which was previewed during the track's drive-through holiday light show, is first to open, and some thrill rides will join the karting track already on site. "We're putting in permanent rides and structures, shade structures and

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