

# VENUES**today**

The news behind the headlines

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Welcome to your **Venues Today** weekly e-newsletter, full of the latest live entertainment industry news. We look forward to hearing your comments. And we invite you to check out our new web site. For further information or to subscribe to *Venues Today* visit [www.venuestoday.com](http://www.venuestoday.com).

## QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"This was more than a building reopening, this was like having an entirely new building commissioned and we had to work hard to test all the support systems...We went from zero to mach speed in one day." — *Doug Thornton, SMG vice president at Louisiana Superdome on reopening the facility after Hurricane Katrina.*

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## VENUE NEWS



***The newly reopened Louisiana Superdome; Rookie Reggie Bush waves after the Saints' first home victory.***

### **SUPERDOME RE-OPENS WITH SUPER BOWL-ESQUE FANFARE**

Just a little over a year after Hurricane Katrina created a humanitarian crisis at the Louisiana Superdome that drew national headlines, the facility was back in operation, hosting a spectacular Monday Night Football event on Sept. 25 to help reopen the iconic stadium.

At the head of that effort was Doug Thornton, regional vice president of SMG at the Superdome and the public face of facility management at the building. Just as he guided his SMG and contracted Centerplate employees through five days of emergency shelter service after the storm, he was on hand again Monday night to oversee the final touches on the \$185-million renovation that brought the Superdome back to life.

"There were lots of congratulations, it was really moving," he said of the opening day.

"Everyone I saw yesterday was so appreciative of the effort. Everywhere I walked through the crowd, people would want to stop you, shake your hand or give you a high-five."

The Monday Night Football game broadcast by ESPN capped off nine months of major renovation work that included repairing the 9.7-acre rooftop, replacing 42 broken elevators and over 72,000 water-damaged seats. During peak repair times, the Superdome had over 850 workers on site.

The game drew a sell-out crowd of 70,500 along with another 10,000 fans who congregated in the front plaza area to tailgate and watch a red-carpet procession for players arriving at the field. Thornton said the red-carpet entrance, which included chauffeured limousines, drew a lot of onlookers but created difficult crowding issues, especially as fans pushed to catch a glimpse of rookie Reggie Bush.

"There's a lot of talk about continuing this tradition for all games, although I'm not sure we could maintain the traffic levels," Thornton said. "We were operating as if we were hosting the Super Bowl, not a Monday Night Football game."

In fact, by 4 p.m., the crowds had become so thick, that they started to spill out on nearby Poydras Street, blocking traffic moving to and from the downtown area. Police halted a free concert by the band Cowboy Mouth to restore order to the scene.

A number of luminaries were on hand for the opening ceremony, including former president George H. W. Bush who presided over the opening coin toss, Dallas Mavericks coach Avery Johnson, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin and filmmaker Spike Lee. Thornton said he spent most of the night interacting with NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell and his predecessor Paul Tagliabue who helped secure \$20 million in NFL funding to assist with the rebuild of the Superdome.

Thornton said the weeks leading up to the opening day went smooth, although there was still plenty of work to be completed at the Superdome. "Over the last couple of weeks, I knew we were going to make it; it was just a matter of how finished things were going to be."

There's still a lot of carpet that needs to be dropped, Thornton said, and tiling work in the building's main escalator lobby has yet to be completed along with painting and touch ups. Thornton said he spent the last days re-lamping the system's electrical lighting systems, repositioning electric carts and replacing advertising panels in most of the signage.

"This was more than a building reopening, this was like having an entirely new building commissioned and we had to work hard to test all the support systems," he said. "We went from zero to mach speed in one day."

One focus that paid off for Thornton and his team was the revamping of the concession stations — per caps on game day were \$22. Thornton said his engineering team used the opportunity from the rebuild to create more inviting concession stations with stainless steel countertops and wash lights, controlled and coordinated by colored low voltage bulbing systems. And while per caps were up, Thornton said he accomplished the high averages without adding any points of sale to the Superdome — all concession spaces were pre-existing uses.

Of course there was some realignment. After the storm, Thornton said the Superdome looked to realign the way it used its club-level, shifting out several attached seats in favor of a lounge-area where patrons could sit at tables and benches and watch the

game from a large glass viewing area.

There's also some major work to be done in the suite-level — fans were served concessions on foldout tables covered in Saints-themed drapings. Thornton said most of the suites are sitting on raw concrete slabs with missing cabinet doors — he hopes to begin work on the suites by December.

"A lot of the suite-holders didn't have any problems with how the suites looked, because right now, that's likely how most of their homes look — no carpet and missing pieces of cabinetry," he said.

In fact, Thornton described the crowd at Monday's game as a resilient bunch, coming together to support a team that represents a community rallying call for those living in New Orleans. Thornton said he encountered dozens, if not hundreds of fans who said they had purchased season tickets to the Saints despite not having a job, or in some cases, a place to live. According to the Saint's ticket sales team, the 2006-2007 season is booked at 95 percent capacity.

For Thornton, the most emotional moment came during the opening nine-minute midfield concert starring Green Day and U2.

"I had seen the show about five times during rehearsal, but it didn't really hit me until the lights went out during the opening show and we were only using the emergency lighting system," he said. "As I looked up at the audience in the darkness, I realized this was the last view I had of the Superdome before I finally had to leave. This time I was only seeing happy cheering faces, but I couldn't help but think back to 13 months ago, and it was a flashback and a wash of emotions came over me." — Dave Brooks

*Interviewed for this article: Doug Thornton, (504) 587-3827*

### **Scene from the Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto.**



### **SCAVENGER HUNT TAKES CNE FAIRGOERS AROUND BMO FIELD SITE**

A new 20,000-seat stadium under construction at Exhibition Place, home of the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE), Toronto, was used in a promotional effort to encourage fairgoers to explore all the grounds.

"We were a little concerned — maybe a little too concerned — that it was dividing the site," said GM David Bednar. "This led us into major promotions that turned out really well."

Fair officials for the Aug. 18-Sept. 4 event partnered with a television station to hold a scavenger hunt which sent participants all over the grounds.

"If you wanted to qualify for the grand prize, you had to go to six booths," Bednar said. "It worked well. It got people moving. The idea was to get

people to see more of the site, that they wouldn't stay in the eastern or western part of the grounds."

The Bank of Montreal just bought the naming rights in a several-year, undisclosed deal, and a still-unnamed soccer team produced by Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment will play on BMO Field, Bednar said.

A public-private partnership including the country, province and city provided the funds to build the \$62.7 million stadium, which should be completed in April, Bednar said.

"The big question is, what are we going to do in the fair?" Bednar said. "We are grandfathered in for the 18 days of the fair for things that don't have an upcharge."

Two soccer games will be held during the fair, Bednar said, and he believes the fair's 2,500-participant Warriors' Day Parade would be a natural event to place in the stadium.

But Bednar noted that he has been downplaying concerts in recent fairs, so he does not know if the stadium will be used for that purpose.

"If we were to have a grandstand-style act where we were charging an extra fee, then we have to negotiate with Maple Leaf and share the revenue with them," he said.

Plus, he noted, Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment also runs the Air Canada Centre, where the Toronto Maple Leafs National Hockey League team plays.

"I can't see them wanting to do concerts for the fair period, because they already have a large, under-cover facility," Bednar said.

Attendance was up slightly for this year's fair, Bednar said. He did not have an audited figure, but he estimated that the attendance will end up being between 1.35 million and 1.4 million, up over last year's 1,248,600.

"Last year was a bad year for a bunch of reasons," Bednar said. "This year, we got six days of rain, and four of them were on weekend days. The weatherman was not cooperative. But considering we had as much rain as we did, it could have been worse."

The fair, which has a budget of nearly \$20 million, changed marketing firms and the traditional slogan of "Let's go to the Ex" was augmented with "Ex Marks the Spot." Marketers branched out once again with additional slogans, such as "Ex Marks the Spot for Fun," "Ex Marks the Spot for Friends," etc.

"I've done some initial research that says it worked well," Bednar said. "It seems to have worked well in the teen demographic."

Previously, fair officials aimed for 24-49-year-olds with children, and this year, in addition to retaining that group, Bednar wanted to go after a younger demographic. "We wanted to recapture the teen market," he said.

That might be why the approximately 60 rides operated by North American Midway Entertainment were up, but food and games were flat, Bednar said.

As for sponsorships, like many other fairs, "we're on the experiential bandwagon," Bednar said. One successful sponsorship from Gillette had women offering to shave men.

"You see more and more of that type of thing," Bednar said. "Sponsors want to see some real results, and for them, it turns into a show. A crowd gathers as this guy is getting shaved and they give out sample razors at the end. We'll see more and more of

it as time goes by.” — Mary Wade Burnside

*Interviewed for this story: David Bednar, (416) 263-3800, ext. 5*



### ***A rendering of the WaMu Theater, Seattle***

#### **WAMU SPONSORS FIRST-OF-A-KIND THEATER AT QWEST FIELD CENTER**

AEG Live and Seattle-based First & Goal Inc. (FGI) have partnered to create a multi purpose theater and corporate events facility within Seattle’s Qwest Field Event Center.

WaMu (Washington Mutual), a Seattle-based bank, has agreed to a 10-year naming rights agreement for the new venue, which will be called the WaMu Theater.

According to Stephen Eckerson, director of facility sales and marketing for the Qwest Field Event Center, the new theater is the first of its kind. “This is not a new structure. It is a portable system that can be moved in and out of the 165,000-square-foot exhibition hall as needed for performances,” he said.

The \$7-million system consists of acoustical curtains, risers, a 100-foot-wide by 60-foot-long stage and a state-of-the-art lighting and sound system. In addition, a mezzanine deck with chairs, a lobby featuring a dropped ceiling and 44 portable concession stands will be part of the theater. “To our knowledge, this is the first time this setup has been instituted on a permanent basis,” Eckerson said.

Point of sale will be emphasized to keep lines short, said Andrew Roe, director of marketing for AEG Live Northwest. "People also won't have to deal with public lots and street parking. Being part of a stadium will be beneficial. We are aiming for a positive fan experience," he said.

The portable venue, which features a flexible seating capacity ranging from 3,300 to 7,000, can be constructed in about eight hours.

Alex Kochan, vice president of AEG Live Northwest, said that, since the closing of the Mercer Arena about five years ago, there has been no mid-size facility in Seattle that accommodates 3,300 people. "The most interesting thing is that the portable theater doesn't take away possibilities for the convention center. It leaves that portion of the business that comes through here intact," he said.

In the past, the exhibition hall couldn't accommodate corporate events. Also, the half-dozen concerts held at the exhibition hall experienced a number of issues. "Acoustically, the results were not encouraging. It was expensive to build the temporary stage and install curtains. It was also a flat floor experience," Kochan said.

With this new setup, there are plans in the works to do tandem events with the new theater and the Seattle Seahawks' games. "Alignment between the Seahawks and the theater is another opportunity for us to attract artists that may want that additional exposure at the games during half-time. We are looking to maximize our relationship with the Seahawks in that setting and cross market between the team and the theater," Kochan said.

Plans for the WaMu Theater's premier celebration are still in the works, but Roe said it will be press intensive and focus on the history of Seattle's music scene. Singer Seal will perform on opening night, Nov. 3. Other acts currently scheduled include Van Morrison on Nov. 4 and All American Rejects on Dec. 6. WaMu will hold its annual meeting at the facility from Jan. 17-19.

"We are hoping to do at least 30 shows a year in this new theater, possibly more," Roe said.

Also in January, details will be unveiled on how WaMu customers in the area can participate in special ticket offerings, including pre-sales surrounding theater events.

FGI currently hosts over 300 events in the Qwest Field Event Center on a year round basis. More than 1.2 million people visit the Qwest Field Event Center annually. It is located adjacent to Qwest Field, home of the Seattle Seahawks. The stadium and event center are owned by the Washington State Public Stadium Authority and are leased to FGI, which operates and maintains the complex.

WaMu, through its subsidiaries, is one of the nation's leading consumer and small business banks. WaMu and its subsidiaries have assets of \$350.70 billion. The company's subsidiary banks currently operate more than 2,600 consumer and small business banking stores throughout the nation. — Lisa White

*Interviewed for this story: Stephen Eckerson, (206) 381-7555; Alex Kochan, (206) 381-7830; Andrew Roe, (206) 381-7800.*



**CONCERTS GROSS RECORD  
\$3.7 MIL AT NEW YORK STATE  
FAIR**

Heavy rain caused by Hurricane Ernesto did not put a damper in the concert line-up at the New York State Fair, Syracuse, which earned a record gross of nearly \$3.7 million.

That sum was earned on ticket sales to a mixture of shows featuring not only such country stalwarts such as Toby Keith and Rascal Flatts, but also an alternative rock bill with the Flaming Lips and Sonic Youth.

"It was a great run from that perspective," said Joe LaGuardia, the fair's marketing director.

The successful shows helped make up for attendance that dropped nearly 3 percent, from last year's 960,145 to 932,387 for the Aug. 24-Sept. 4 fair.

"That's pretty good considering we lost a Sunday and the second Saturday to rain," said LaGuardia, who noted that only about half of the 100,000 fairgoers that usually attend the fair on each of those days actually did. The fair's record attendance stands at 1,011,248 in 2001. "If it wasn't for the rain, we would have come close to or surpassed our all-time record."

Keith drew the best crowds to the 16,400-seat Mohegan Sun Grandstand, sponsored by a casino, with 14,897. Just behind that bill, which also included Joe Nichols, were Rascal Flatts and Gary Allan, with 14,836. Keith Urban drew 11,235 and James Taylor, 10,631.

Ticket prices ranged from \$52-\$47 for Keith, \$54-\$49 for Taylor, and \$50-\$45 for Urban.

LaGuardia was not able to disclose his budget for the acts, but noted that he tends to buy based on what he believes will draw well as opposed to worrying about the guarantees.

"We'll pay the high guarantees where we think it's warranted," he said. "We've gone to the highest level of entertainment that we can book. We have a high level of expectation from our concertgoers, and we have not had resistance when we've increased the ticket prices to get to the level. We sure don't like to have ticket prices increase, but it gets to the point where you have to be at a certain level."

This year, the fair moved to a different concert ticket pricing structure that lowered the range between tickets sold for each concert from \$5 to \$2. This year's top ticket prices were \$54, \$52, \$50, \$45 and \$40, compared to \$49, \$48, \$46, \$40 and \$36 last year.

The fair's line-up mirrors a similar one at the Great Allentown (Pa.) Fair booked by Bonnie Brosious during the same time period and both experienced bad weather, but the New York State Fair had better results.

Although the stage and some of the seats of the Mohegan Sun Grandstand are covered, some concert attendees sat through shows in heavy rain.

"We have incredibly loyal fairgoers and concertgoers," LaGuardia said. "They know if it rains to be prepared, and they come prepared."

In addition to Taylor, both the New York State Fair and the Great Allentown Fair booked Gretchen Wilson, the Black Eyed Peas, and the two alternative shows, one featuring the Flaming Lips, Sonic Youth, the Magic Numbers and Ween, and the other Taking Back Sunday on a bill that also was supposed to feature My Chemical Romance. That band canceled both fairs after the drummer was hospitalized.

"Obviously, we try to do things that would make some sense," LaGuardia said. "You'll find that with Bonnie and me and even David Grimm (at the Champlain Valley Fair, Essex Junction, Vt.). We can provide three dates back to back, and to an act, that makes it worthwhile."

Like the New York State Fair, the Champlain Valley Fair also featured Urban and Rascal Flatts as well as Jesse McCartney.

For a second year in a row, the fair was hampered by a Labor Day-weekend hurricane that LaGuardia hopes does not become a trend.

"We're in a cycle in which we're not just getting rain, but we're getting heavy rain," LaGuardia said. "And it's not just in the central New York area, it's statewide. When it's statewide, it affects everything."

While the concerts survived the rain in record-breaking fashion, the carnival did not do as well. The Orlando, Fla.-based Strates Shows, which fielded 56 rides on the midway, probably will be on par or a bit down from last year, LaGuardia said.

But sponsorships are up \$300,000 to \$3 million, including both cash and in-kind at the fair where the Cingular Wireless Concert Series is held on the Coors & Labatt Stage of the Mohegan Sun Grandstand.

"We're trying to max out all the acreage we have," said LaGuardia of the 200 acres of the Empire Expo Center, with an additional 175 acres across the highway parking that provides room for a maximum of 25,000 vehicles.

This year, fair officials removed a parking area next to the administration building to make room for a sponsorship exhibit area.

"We've added spaces that used to be used by non-revenue elements," LaGuardia said.

"We looked at that and said, 'Why don't we try to maximize the square footage that could be rentable, usable income space.'"

Many of the fair's sponsors return and often have multi-year agreements. "We have been fortunate," LaGuardia said.

As for marketing, the fair has been using the Internet more and more. The loyal attendees of the New York State Fair also apparently do not mind using the Internet, and this year for the first time, had the opportunity to buy all tickets via computer.

Officials also made the choice to stagger the sale of the concert tickets for fairgoers who might want to attend multiple shows but for whom plunking down the money for several acts at once might be a hardship. "It worked out great," LaGuardia said. – Mary Wade Burnside

*Interviewed for this story: Joe LaGuardia, (315) 487-7711*

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## YEAR END DEADLINES - MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

### The 2006 year end wrap up is right around the corner!

The *Venues Today* December issue will contain our popular year end **Hot Tickets** and **Top Stops** reports, as well as our second annual **Hall of Headlines Awards**.

The deadline to submit concert and event grosses for inclusion in the year end **Hot Tickets and Top Stops charts** is **October 23, 2006**. The events considered must have taken place **between October 16, 2005 and October 15, 2006**. To request a list of events already reported for your venue or company, to send reports for inclusion, or for questions about this process, e-mail: [HotTickets@venuestoday.com](mailto:HotTickets@venuestoday.com). Reports may also be faxed to: (714) 378-0040.

Know someone who bettered the industry in 2006? Be sure to submit your nominations for the second annual **Hall of Headlines Awards**. Nominees will be sought for the following four categories: News, Marketing, Concessions and Bookings. Include the name of the person or company being nominated, the affiliation or location, and a brief description of the achievement that took place in 2006. The deadline to submit nominations is **October 15, 2006**. E-mail nominations to: [Linda@venuestoday.com](mailto:Linda@venuestoday.com) or fax to: (714) 378-0040.

As always, thank you for your prompt attention and for your continued support!

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## BOOKINGS



### HOTtickets

#### WATERS FILLS GARDEN

**HOT TICKETS** is a weekly summary of the top acts and ticket sales as reported to **Venues Today** e-newsletter. Following are the top 20 concerts and events, the top 5 in each seating capacity category, which took place since Sept. 5, 2006. To submit reports, e-mail [HotTickets@venuestoday.com](mailto:HotTickets@venuestoday.com) or fax to (714)

378-0040.

The **Hot Tickets** this week as reported to **Venues Today**:

#### 15,001 or More Seats

1) *Gross Sales:* \$2,722,257; *Event:* Roger Waters; *Venue:* **Madison Square Garden Arena, New York**; *Attendance:* 29,488; *Ticket Range:* \$170-\$35; *Promoter:* Live Nation; *Dates:* Sept. 12-13; *No. of Shows:* 2

2) *Gross Sales:* \$1,515,708; *Event:* Tool; *Venue:* **Cricket Pavilion, Phoenix**; *Attendance:* 20,234; *Ticket Range:* \$51.50-\$20; *Promoter:* Live Nation; *Dates:* Sept. 9; *No. of Shows:* 1

3) *Gross Sales:* \$1,275,521; *Event:* Eric Clapton; *Venue:* **Xcel Energy Center, Saint Paul, Minn.**; *Attendance:* 13,594; *Ticket Range:* \$123.25-\$58.25; *Promoter:* Jam

Productions; *Dates:* Sept. 16; *No. of Shows:* 1

4) *Gross Sales:* \$1,259,036; *Event:* Shakira; *Venue:* **Madison Square Garden Arena, New York**; *Attendance:* 15,756; *Ticket Range:* \$125-\$15; *Promoter:* Live Nation; *Dates:* Sept. 8; *No. of Shows:* 1

5) *Gross Sales:* \$1,205,265; *Event:* Eric Clapton; *Venue:* **United Center, Chicago**; *Attendance:* 13,018; *Ticket Range:* \$125-\$60; *Promoter:* Jam Productions; *Dates:* Sept. 20; *No. of Shows:* 1

#### **10,001 - 15,000 Seats**

1) *Gross Sales:* \$1,557,830; *Event:* The Who; *Venue:* **Nikon at Jones Beach Theater, Wantagh, N.Y.**; *Attendance:* 13,202; *Ticket Range:* \$258.50-\$50; *Promoter:* Live Nation; *Dates:* Sept. 13; *No. of Shows:* 1

2) *Gross Sales:* \$546,966; *Event:* Mariah Carey; *Venue:* **MTS Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba**; *Attendance:* 8,915; *Ticket Range:* \$115.88-\$17; *Promoter:* Live Nation; *Dates:* Sept. 19; *No. of Shows:* 1

3) *Gross Sales:* \$483,697; *Event:* Philadelphia Flyers vs. Pittsburgh Penguins Pre-Season Exhibition Game; *Venue:* **John Labatt Centre, London, Ontario**; *Attendance:* 8,769; *Ticket Range:* \$62.84-\$40.40; *Promoter:* Global Spectrum; *Dates:* Sept. 24; *No. of Shows:* 1

4) *Gross Sales:* \$432,086; *Event:* Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers; *Venue:* **Stephen C. O'Connell Center, Gainesville, Fla.**; *Attendance:* 8,540; *Ticket Range:* \$59.50-\$49.50; *Promoter:* Fantasma Productions; *Dates:* Sept. 6; *No. of Shows:* 1

5) *Gross Sales:* \$376,021; *Event:* Nickelback; *Venue:* **Bi-Lo Center, Greenville, S.C.**; *Attendance:* 8,565; *Ticket Range:* \$45.50; *Promoter:* AEG Live, Concerts West, Fastlane Concerts, The Messina Group; *Dates:* Sept. 6; *No. of Shows:* 1

#### **5,001-10,000 Seats**

1) *Gross Sales:* \$337,849; *Event:* Chris Brown; *Venue:* **Chastain Park Amphitheatre, Atlanta**; *Attendance:* 6,530; *Ticket Range:* \$65.75-\$40.75; *Promoter:* Live Nation; *Dates:* Sept. 9; *No. of Shows:* 1

2) *Gross Sales:* \$316,886; *Event:* Sound Tribe Sector 9; *Venue:* **Red Rocks Amphitheatre, Denver**; *Attendance:* 9,202; *Ticket Range:* \$35.25; *Promoter:* Live Nation, Kroenke Sports Enterprises; *Dates:* Sept. 9; *No. of Shows:* 1

3) *Gross Sales:* \$300,345; *Event:* Bonnie Raitt; *Venue:* **Greek Theatre, Los Angeles**; *Attendance:* 4,433; *Ticket Range:* \$85,\$30; *Promoter:* Nederlander; *Dates:* Sept. 9; *No. of Shows:* 1

4) *Gross Sales:* \$208,825; *Event:* A.F.I.; *Venue:* **Bill Graham Civic Auditorium, San Francisco**; *Attendance:* 8,787; *Ticket Range:* \$25; *Promoter:* Live Nation; *Dates:* Sept. 9; *No. of Shows:* 1

5) *Gross Sales:* \$207,724; *Event:* The New Cars and Berlin; *Venue:* **Chastain Park**

**Amphitheatre, Atlanta**; Attendance: 3,665; Ticket Range: \$59.25-\$37.25; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Sept. 8; No. of Shows: 1

### 5,000 or Fewer Seats

1) Gross Sales: \$373,660; Event: Ben Harper; Venue: **Bank Of America Pavilion, Boston**; Attendance: 10,284; Ticket Range: \$40-\$28.50; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Sept. 8-9; No. of Shows: 2

2) Gross Sales: \$215,606; Event: Bonnie Raitt; Venue: **Santa Barbara (Calif.) Bowl**; Attendance: 3,648; Ticket Range: \$69.50-\$35.50; Promoter: Nederlander; Dates: Sept. 10; No. of Shows: 1

3) Gross Sales: \$215,400; Event: Tony Bennett; Venue: **The Mountain Winery, Saratoga, Calif.**; Attendance: 1,750; Ticket Range: \$150-\$75; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Sept. 9; No. of Shows: 1

4) Gross Sales: \$198,240; Event: Charles Aznavour; Venue: **Warner Theatre, Washington**; Attendance: 1,847; Ticket Range: \$135-\$50; Promoter: LSBO Production Inc.; Dates: Sept. 16; No. of Shows: 1

5) Gross Sales: \$192,143; Event: Southern Baptist Sissies; Venue: **Majestic Theatre, San Antonio**; Attendance: 3,466; Ticket Range: \$103.50-\$26.50; Promoter: Season of Shores; Dates: Sept. 16-17; No. of Shows: 4

Compiled by Rob Ocampo, [HotTickets@venuestoday.com](mailto:HotTickets@venuestoday.com)

### A flyer for the Countdown Spectacular Tour



### COUNTDOWN 1 BEGETS COUNTDOWN 2 IN GUDINSKI'S BOOK

Michael Gudinski worked on the plans for the recently wrapped Countdown Spectacular tour for years. There was no way he was going to pay homage to the "American Bandstand" of Australia unless he had things exactly right.

"This [Countdown] is our equivalent of Dick Clark or [England's] 'Top of the Pops,'" said the legendary Aussie promoter. "It was a very powerful show, a real leader in radio and a big part of the musical culture here for a long time. It was the soundtrack to my working life and the lives of so many baby boomers here."

For that reason, Gudinski — seeing the strong box office of such boomer acts as Billy Joel and the Eagles and Australian nostalgia acts — knew

he wanted to get it just right, The concept was born after he sold his Mushrooms Records label to Rupert Murdoch in 1999, the same year he staged a one-off 25th anniversary concert for the label that gave him the idea for the Countdown tour.

"That was a huge event with 70,000 people and it was very emotional," Gudinski said. "So for many years after that I was very proud of it and I thought we could do something on a similar scale, but which covered the mid 1970s to late 1980s of

Australian music." The legendary show ran on Australian TV from 1974 to 1987.

The tour featured mini-sets from 26 acts who made their names on the program, including: Sherbet, Hush, John Paul Young, Leo Sayer, James Reyne, Mondo Rock, Renee Geyer, Jon English, Chantoozies, Alex Smith (Moving Pictures), Choirboys, Brian Canham (Pseudo Echo), James Freud & Sean Kelly (Models), Swanee, Jo Jo Zep, Brian Mannix (Uncanny X-Men), Cheetah, Shane Howard (Goanna), Scott Carne (Kids In The Kitchen), Eurogliders, Dave Sterry (Real Life), Billy Miller (The Ferrets), Stephen Cummings (The Sports), Frankie J. Holden & Wilbur Wilde (Ol' 55), Joe Dolce, Paul Norton and Wendy Stapleton (The Rocketts).

The three-hour, 70-song show was hosted by original outrageous Countdown MC, Ian "Molly" Meldrum, and included announcer Gavin Wood and the Countdown dancers, as well as tributes to Australian icons who have died, including Shirley Strachan (Skyhooks), Michael Hutchence (INXS), Bon Scott (AC/DC), Steve Gilpin (Mi-Sex), Ted Mulry (TMG) and Marc Hunter (Dragon).

The 10-show tour hit Newcastle, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane between Aug. 30 and Sept. 17, playing to 80,000, with five sell-outs. Tickets ranged from \$99-\$162. Two grosses from four shows were reported to *Venues Today*: AcerArena, Sydney, grossing \$1,392,188 from 16,516 attending two shows, Sept. 1-2; and \$1,170,006 from 13,300 at Brisbane Entertainment Centre, Sept. 16-17.

The ABC television program was a tradition across Australia during its run, with Gudinski describing entire families gathering around the tube every Sunday at 6 p.m. to catch the latest and greatest homegrown acts. It was that emotional connection that Gudinski said he wanted to tap into with the tour.

"When we put together the show, we wanted an interesting combination of artists, but we also wanted it to be a hit packed, very tight show," he said of the pacing, which featured no more than 2 minutes of downtime between sets and quick turn arounds thanks to revolving stages. The set also featured three large video screens, which played classic interviews from the TV show's run during downtime. "When you're appealing to fans of that era ... people have less patience, they're getting older and they want to hear the songs they know."

Gudinski said the tour elicited more email response from fans than any other he's ever done, including the wildly successful outings by homegrown diva Kylie Minogue. The tour's sets were designed by the television program's original designers and one of the program's original producers helped compile and run the classic slips during the concert.

"Love was, literally, in the air, because the TV show had people lip synching and miming and people didn't expect it to be such a great concert," he said. During the five days of rehearsal before the first show, Gudinski said the camaraderie between the acts was palpable, especially ones that had not seen each other for almost 20 years.

After the first few dates, the success of the tour already got Gudinski thinking about doing a second run in less than a year, which might also add some international artists. He is currently confirming venues for Countdown 2 and hopes to announce the dates within the next few months.

Prior to the tour's launch, Gudinski helped compile a hit 66-song CD/DVD set from the original run of the TV show that has already set Australian records for DVD sales; the combined sales for the CD and DVD on Gudinski's own Liberation Music are in excess of 100,000. He plans to release a 3-disc DVD of the live show around the same time as

a late November television special about the tour.

Gudinski hit the boomer audience with a number of different merchandise items, from a selection of black t-shirts, to a teddy bear, tea towel, mugs, keyrings, glowstix, flashing baseball hats, magnets and a show program, which accounted for more than 50% of merchandise sales. Final merchandise figures and grosses were not available at press time.

An ABC-crafted book entitled "Countdown The Wonder Years" was also available, along with the Countdown CD and DVD.

The show was a huge undertaking, using eight semi trucks to cart equipment, a crew of 40 and a cast of 80 that required 120 hotel rooms. — Gil Kaufman

*Interviewed for this story: Michael Gudinski, 011 612 9332-2411*

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## MARKETING

### SECONDARIES LOOK AT INTERNET TECHNOLOGY TO BOOST MARKET SHARE

While ticket sale charts continue to be the dominant scale for measuring the success of a ticketing agency, secondary ticketing firms are looking at a new medium to measure success — comScores.

Powered by a media-marketing company of the same name, comScores determine e-commerce sites effectiveness by measuring site traffic, sales and a number of other audience-measurement variables to determine effectiveness. So it was with much surprise and trepidation when comScores ranked TicketLiquidator one of the top secondary ticketing sites on the Internet, just a few years after the firm had launched from Vernon, Conn.

Company Vice President Nick Eve said the success of the firm had as much to do with improving the Internet experience as it did with Internet visibility. Eve said his firm had dedicated much of its marketing budget to non-traditional advertising on the web, but more importantly, it had developed a large-scale social networking sister site called PluggedIn for fans to share photos, stories and even videos from their favorite concerts and live performances. The site also has a space for blogs, as well as a number of hired contributors who regularly update the site with content on the concert industry. The page even includes a forums page where fans can post comments if they've had negative experiences purchasing secondary tickets.

The site is just one more way to drive traffic to TicketLiquidator.com, said Eve, and more importantly, a way to transform secondary ticket e-commerce sites from a click-through purchasing use to an internet destination, where fans hang out for long periods of time and brokers have a captive audience.

"For us, we're trying to keep the focus on a content-based product," Eve said. "A place where people want to hang out with other fans and share their experiences."

In the saturated online ticketing market, it's no longer enough to create an easy site where customers can simply buy tickets. To stand out from the pack and create an experience that will draw back repeat customers, the crux of the secondary market, ticket brokers have to create avenues to extend the concert experience beyond the walls of the venue, TicketNetwork President and CEO Don Vaccaro said.

"Every secondary guy wants to be out there and extend the fan experience," Vaccaro said. Many brokers are finding a number of ways to use the Internet to offer value-adds for their customers. Vaccaro said secondaries in most markets offer patrons customized directions to concerts and events, online restaurant and hotel guides and even weather and traffic reports to direct them to events.

Vaccaro said secondary firms are using the Internet to attract sponsorship deals with sports leagues that can generate revenue for both sides. While it's becoming much more common for ticket brokers to work out deals with professional teams for in-stadium signage, Vaccaro said he's now seeing brokers ask for advertising links on a venue's home page. To entice the web-marketing, many brokers are offering venues a percentage of all sales from the broker's site that are driven from a web-link on the venue's page — even if the fan uses the broker's site to buy a ticket for a different venue.

Eve said his site wants to take it a step further by creating an online space where fans can congregate before and after concerts.

"People have a better time if they can take photos and share those experiences," he said. "Fans are looking for social outlets to connect with other people."

Eve wouldn't say how much money TicketLiquidator had invested in running the PluggedIn social networking component, but he did say that it required a dedicated staff of about three to four engineers to correctly operate. He said there were some revenue opportunities through online advertising, and even a data collection component for targeted marketing campaigns, but most of that information was already available through e-commerce avenues. For now, PluggedIn would simply be a promotional tool of TicketLiquidator that would drive fans to the site and prolong their online usage.

"For us, we're trying to keep the focus on being a content-based product," he said. "A place where fans can go to hang out with each other."

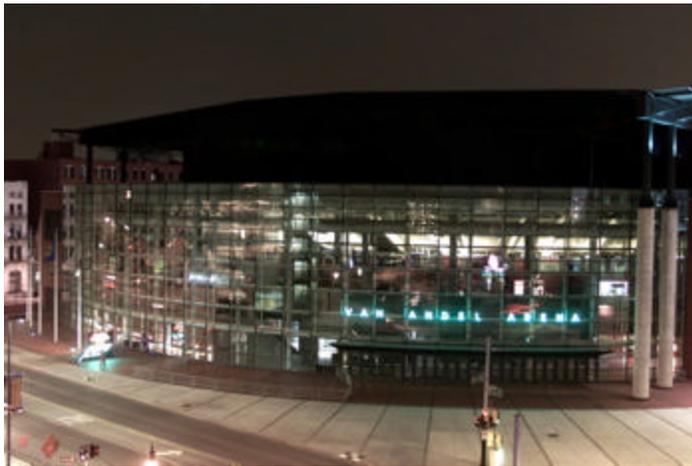
The site is also a means to encourage transparency, Eve said, by providing a forum where fans can openly discuss the secondary market, and in some instances, lodge their complaints and concerns. In fact, Eve said the entire system runs on an open-source platform, where residents can view the coding applications and observe how they operate.

*Interviewed for this article: Nick Eve, (860) 871-5930; Don Vaccaro (860) 870-3400*

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## CONCESSIONS

***Van Andel Arena, Grand Rapids, Mich.***



### GRAND RAPIDS KEEPS GROWING FOR SMG

With the addition of SMG Food Services to handle concessions and catering at Van Andel Arena and increased interest in building an amphitheater which SMG would likely manage, the stakes just keep getting bigger for SMG at its Grand Rapids, Mich., properties. The management inventory currently includes the 10-year-old arena and the one-year old DeVos Place Convention Center and DeVos Performance

Hall.

Talk of an amphitheater is music to Rich MacKeigan's ear. It could boost his summers, and, having just come off a slow one, he would like to see that happen.

SMG Food Services moved into the arena on July 1, said MacKeigan, general manager there for SMG. Concessions had previously been handled by Centerplate. The authority did a soft RFP, which was between just those two companies, and chose SMG to increase margins and service levels, he said. "We addressed both of those extremely

well.”

According to public records, the deal is for three years with a two-year option. The venue receives 53 percent of the gross from concessions and 19.5 percent from catering. Food and drink grosses just over \$4 million at the arena.

SMG Food Services now has over 60 different accounts, most in response to a management client's request.

Chris Reynolds, regional manager for SMG Food, oversees 12 of them. He brought in Amy Capehart, formerly in Saginaw, Mich., as director of catering sales at Van Andel, which has 44 suites. Ben Booker, formerly with the Ford Center in Beaumont, Texas, is the new director of food, beverage and retail, though retail is not part of the deal.

Reynolds said that through the first six events at Van Andel Arena for SMG Food Services, sales have increased an average of 25 percent. For Eric Clapton, Sept. 21, per caps were a healthy \$8.75 for the sold out show, he said. “The average for concerts has been a little over \$7,” he said.

Changes under the new regime had included adding portables for more points of sale and introducing new menu items. SMG operated 86 points of sale for the Clapton show, 58 of which are permanent, Reynolds told *Venues Today*.

The also updated the point-of-sale system, buying the newest from Tangent. Now customers at Van Andel concessions are able to use credit cards for the first time. Reynolds said that particularly in a college town like Grand Rapids, credit card transactions are essential. “We’re averaging 8-12 percent on credit card charges,” he said of the first two months of operation.

Overall, SMG will invest approximately \$375,000 in equipment and improvements for food service at Van Andel the first year, Reynolds said.

Other changes have included new menu items. Reynolds said they now offer barbecue nachos, which is the usual delicacy with barbecue sauce options as well as cheese; Philly cheesesteaks; and 5/1 (five to one pound) hot dogs, replacing the 8/1 previously offered.

The SMG food contract does not include DeVos Place. The headquarters hotel, the Amway Grand Plaza, provides food and beverage there, in a deal that is in place until 2011.

On the horizon in Grand Rapids is a new amphitheater. MacKeigan would love to see one in the market, to attract the outdoor shows that bypass the region now.

“The board I answer to is currently exploring the concept of building an amphitheater in the market. We have a feasibility study by a local architect, primarily site selection. We already have slightly dated feasibility studies relative to the business model that we’re looking to update. We expect to have that done at the end of the calendar year, and at that point my board will make a decision as to whether to explore it further or not,” MacKeigan said of the status. He answers to the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority.

Everything is flexible, from a price tag ranging from \$10 million to \$20 million to a capacity from 6,000-15,000. The earliest it might open is late 2008, early 2009. Progressive A&E, a local architect, is undertaking site selection. They are looking at land the county currently owns in a park that is two miles west the Van Andel's front

door. The intent is to use synergies and opportunities available downtown, MacKeigan said.

"SMG would probably manage it. The authority just initiated a five-year relationship to manage the arena, convention center and theater, and every indication is they would want us to be a partner in the shed as well," MacKeigan said..

The area has never had an amphitheater, he said. "There is no outdoor play in the marketplace of West Michigan."

"Beyond the programming complement, it also provides me with more opportunity. I have some great local staff and it provides them some professional development options," MacKeigan said. "That's something we need. The new \$220 million convention center just opened up a year ago February and one of the outcomes of that has been increased opportunities for some of our key staff. And there are synergies to take advantage of. If the arena is slow, they could work at the amphitheater."

Portions of funding are in place, he said. "I wouldn't foresee lack of funding will be an issue. Once the cost is determined, the lion's share, if not the entire balance, is ready."  
— Linda Deckard

*Interviewed for this story: Rich MacKeigan, (616) 742-6189; Chris Reynolds, (616) 742-6600*



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## SHORT TAKES

### **WOLFMOOTHER CANCELS U.S. TOUR AFTER EARLY BIRTH**

Australian Rock band Wolfmother has cancelled the remainder of its US tour after its bassist Chris Ross' partner gave birth to a baby earlier than expected. The band was planning a break from the tour in October to prepare for the birth, but have now headed back to Australia and will return to the U.S. in December to continue the tour and replay several California dates.

Contact: Jennie Boddy, (212) 841-8023

### **BRISBANE ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE ANNOUNCES SEVERAL NEW POSITIONS**

The Brisbane Entertainment Centre in Australia has announced several new appointments including Trish McNamara as the facility's new general manager. McNamara has worked at the center for the 18 years. Also receiving new appointments are Graham Hedley, who was appointed as the new catering manager; Glen Rainsbury, who has been promoted to the position of events manager; and Francis Murtagh, who will work as the center's new assets manager.

Contact: Tim Worton (612) 8765-4355

### **HONG KONG CONVENTION CENTRE HAS RECORD SUMMER**

The Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre's (HKCEC) banner year continued into the summer, posting the best summer in its 18-year history. For the summer, the centre hosted 17 exhibitions, up 9.5% to \$7 million. Total attendance grew 5.3% to 2.65 million. HKCEC Managing Director Cliff Wallace said part of the center's boost was attributed to shows attended by locals.

Contact: Jacqueline Ip: (852) 2582 7891

### **GLOBAL SPECTRUM ROLLS OUT CONTEST TO SHOWCASE CONSTANT SITE**

Global Spectrum is giving away a pair of tickets and a chance to meet Amy Grant on Oct. 21 at the Constant Center at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Va., through an online promotion on the facility's new website at [www.constantcenter.com](http://www.constantcenter.com). Visitors to the site who join the "All Access Club" before Oct. 15 will be entered to win two tickets to see Amy Grant perform with the Virginia Symphony and receive passes to meet Amy Grant in person. The "All Access Club" is designed to provide members with information about concerts.

Contact: Jill Schirmer, (757) 683-5204

### **COMPASS REUPS AT RIVERCENTER**

The Davenport (Iowa) City Council has awarded management of the RiverCenter/Adler Theatre to Compass Facility Management following a competitive bidding process. Compass has managed the facilities since 1997, receiving contract renewals in 2002 and 2005. Compass will continue to be in charge of all services at the facility, including booking, operations, marketing and sales, finances, human resources, and sales of contractually obligated incomes. The Adler Theatre hosts a Broadway series, a variety of performing arts, and is home to the Quad City Symphony.

Contact: David Olson, (515) 232-5151

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## **HELP WANTED**

Due to the popularity of our free help wanted listings, we've reconstructed how they display. The new process will allow companies to ultimately display lengthier descriptions. The heading will remain the same - a bolded title of the company and the listing. However, only the first line of description will be listed in the e-newsletter. Viewers can click the link to our website where they can view a much more thorough description of the open position.

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