



First and Goal

Young rushes Oventions to its first NFL account

BY LINDA DECKARD

By securing the concessions contract at Alltel Stadium, home of the Jacksonville (Fla.) Jaguars of the National Football League, Ken Young and crew moved Oventions Food Services into the big leagues. While they had won a National Basketball Association contract at the Rose Garden, Portland, Ore., home of the Portland Trail Blazers, the stadiums are simply in a different league.

"It's just gigantic for us and the reason is, when you start looking at the NFL and Major League Baseball, they are huge accounts," said Young, who is president of Oventions and also owns two minor league baseball teams. "There is a lot of prestige to them. But more than anything, demonstrating as a comparatively smaller company that we can provide excellent service to that size venue — that's so important to have on your resume. When the quality of the service is high and you're able to encourage the per caps and an NFL client is happy with your services and your company, that's very important for future growth."

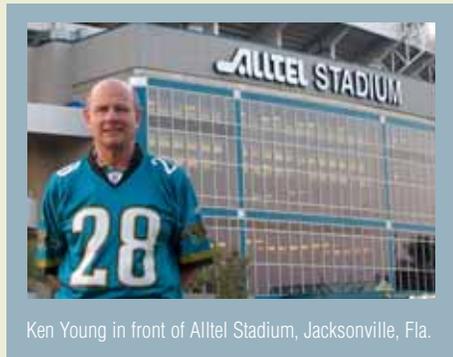
And that's why Young won the *Venues Today* Hall of Headlines Award for Concessions. His accomplishment this year will change the odds as Oventions seeks other major league contracts, competing with the large, long established concessions companies for contracts like the Washington Nationals of Major League Baseball.

Oventions has followed the contract victory with quality performance, Young said. Seven games into their first season there, and even considering they won the contract too late to make many major construction changes, concessions per caps on an average are up 12 percent, from \$10.06 to \$11.50, Young said.

"We improved the menu with additional high ticket items. Also, we increased 'serving fresh.' We put in a lot more equipment and opened more portable stands. We don't pre-wrap," Young said.

The fans have taken to it, he said. "Opening more portables has enabled us to sell more beverages, too. That's how we increased those per caps."

At the time the Jaguars selected Oventions, Bill Prescott, senior vice president of stadium operations and chief financial officer for the team, said he liked that Oventions brought some fresh concepts to the table in terms of how food is served. "This is their first NFL venue and they will bring the excitement and



Ken Young in front of Alltel Stadium, Jacksonville, Fla.

tension to take our fans' experience to the next level," Prescott said.

Young, who has been in the concessions business for 34 years, started Oventions 11 years ago under the name Leisure & Recreation

Consultants. His personal first NFL job was vending at Franklin Field for Philadelphia Eagles games while he was a high school student. He worked at Chiefs Stadium in Kansas City, part of the Truman Sports Complex, in the mid-70s, early in his professional career.

He counts some legends in the industry as his mentors. The late Larry Kelly, general manager for ARA Services (now Aramark), taught Young the ropes at the Providence (R.I.) Civic Center (now Dunkin' Donuts Center), in 1972-74. "Inventory and cash control is where it's at in the concessions side of the business," he learned.

The late Bill Lemons, district manager in Kansas City for Volume Services (now Centerplate), taught Young the creative side. "More than anything, he taught you to think outside the box," Young said, which came in particularly handy when the job was selling merchandise, as happened when the Pope visited the U.S. "As far as setting up additional units and building monstrosities on the field, Bill was a guy who could go out and get the extra dime," Young recalled of early concerts on the green.

And on the sales and marketing side, Vince Pantuso, president of Volume Services at the time, "taught you how to assess a prospect. When it came to the sales process, Vince wanted perfection. That has stuck with me," Young said.

Young's long and established concessions career has led now to a new challenge, a new company and a chance to have yet another impact on an industry he has made his profession for 30 years. "The goal probably doesn't have as much to do with size, but you want it to be a good size company. The goal is to make it the highest quality food service company serving recreation clients as possible. That's what we talk about," Young said.

The changes in menu and the way food is served is night and day since the seventies, he said. The next big changes will all revolve around technology, particularly in credit and debit card transactions. "In the next 20 years, we can't even imagine where we'll be," he said, except he does expect to be in more NFL and Major League Baseball stadiums.



CONCESSIONS