





# AND THEY'RE OFF

Young is back after taking Ovations to the speedway

by DAVE BROOKS



Rolling in style at the Gateway International Raceway in St. Louis.

Ken Young has done it again. Just one year after taking Ovations Food Services to the next level by securing an NFL contract with the Jacksonville Jaguars, Young is making new inroads for his 11-year-old concessions company with a recent deal to provide food services for three speedways.

His contracts to provide concessions for Gateway International Raceway, near St. Louis; Memphis (Tenn.) Motorsports Park; and Nashville (Tenn.) Super Speedway has helped Young win the *Venues Today* Hall of Headlines Award for Concessions for the second year in a row.

"The fact that we were able to get into the racing business is very important to our model and it will lead to further announcements for future racetracks," he said. "I see it leaning to much more similar type businesses in the future."

Young said racetracks are very desirable for a growing food company like Ovations — their sheer size can accommodate a large amount of visitors, most events run all-day or run over several days and all three racetracks are in key markets for Ovations — the company services the Nashville (Tenn.) Convention Center; St. Louis University's new convocation center and AutoZone Park, home of the Memphis (Tenn.) Redbirds minor league baseball team.

"It's strategic not only in that it reinforces our current contracts, but also that it puts us in a position to continue to move into other speedways," Young said. "As we start to show that our model works, we're going to be able use that credibility to move to larger tracks."

At the Gateway speedway, Ovations was able to increase per caps by 11 percent from \$5.47 in 2006 to \$6.17 the following year. Local races saw per caps jump 34 percent after the Ovations team introduced a new menu. Ovations plans to invest \$1 million for upgrades to the three racetracks, with the Memphis Motorsports Park receiving the bulk of the investment.

"As we show that we can increase per caps and customers, we're going to continue to stand out in a market where the competition is extremely fierce," he said. "The big lesson is that this simply is our first foray into the racetrack business and we're learning about how everything works, although we knew we could do an excellent job. We started out trying to do the best we can because it can lead to other business."

Success is as simple as good customer service and high quality food items, he said. Ovations workers use the "How Ya Doin'?" campaign, created by Ovations' parent company Global Spectrum, a subsidiary of Comcast-Spectacor.

"That's something that we try to use in all our venues as much as we can. It really leads to the employee knowing we're stressing quality customer service."

More importantly, the company is renewing its focus on better ingredients and quality food preparation techniques.

"We also have some new ideas specializing in the fresh approach," said regional Vice President John LeChance. "I think (the clients) liked the fact that we could provide higher quality ingredients and products."

Products like the quarter-pound black Angus burger, served open faced and cooked fresh, have become the number-one selling item at the Memphis speedway, while Ovations has been able to maintain similar price points for previous items sold at the facility.

"It's also the presentation, once it's in their hands they can really see the quality," LeChance said.

Young said his staff tries to put a fresh emphasis on all products, even the hot dogs, which he never pre-wraps or pre-cooks. On the catering side, his staff emphasizes product display and fresh appearance so that when the customer walks in for a meal, everything looks professional and fresh.

"I think in all situations, customers are demanding higher quality. They want bigger and better. They're not satisfied with the sawdust hot dog anymore. If you give a customer options to go bigger and better, seven times out of 10 they'll spend extra for something that is higher quality."

LeChance said the team also learned about the many nuances of different race fan types. National Hot Rod Association fans often purchased meals and didn't mind hawking in the stands, because their races were so short and there was a lot of down time between each event.

National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, or NASCAR, fans however hated hawking because most races were continual events and hawkers just seemed to get in the way.

"The biggest learning curve was understanding the needs and buying habits of the different types of race fans," LeChance said.

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