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VT PULSE

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Quote of the Week

"What if you took all that TSO is doing and mix it with the video concept Celine had and present it with the music you were famous for presenting back in the 70s? What if Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin were on stage together? The show was born that night in my mind."

— Rick Bowen on his new arena show "Flashback - the Classic Rock Experience"

In this Issue

THE NEWS
[Retro Promoter Launches The Classic Rock Experience. A Concert Event](#)

[EAMC Gets Political With Capital City Confab](#)

[Amphitheatre Gives Out Gas Discount To Bring Fans To Shows](#)

HOT TICKETS
[Chesney Brings NFL-Sized Crowds To Stadiums](#)

THE BEAT
[Construction Report](#)

[On The Menu: NBA Finals Games 1, 2 and 3](#)

DEPARTMENTS
[Short Takes](#)

[HELP WANTED](#)

Greetings April,

Welcome to VT Pulse, your weekly guide to the "News Behind the Headlines." We're back after a week off and several days in Washington, D.C., at the Event & Arena Marketing Conference. Since then, we have been inundated with your votes for our second annual Women of Influence balloting. And the results are in. Visit www.venuestoday.com and click on the Vote Page for the news.



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VT NEWS

BOOKINGS
RETRO PROMOTER LAUNCHES THE CLASSIC ROCK EXPERIENCE

Billboard art for "Flashback – the Classic Rock Experience"



Much as he did in the late 60s, early 70s when he was with East Coast Concerts and Concerts West, Rick Bowen is

CONTACT VT PULSE

SHORT
TAKES

>> **TRUMP DUMPS A.C. CASINO** – Trump Entertainment is selling the Trump Marina Hotel Casino in Atlantic City, N.J. to Coastal Marina LLC. Selling for \$316 million, the sale marks the third casino property acquired by chairman of Coastal Marina Richard T. Fields. Under the new ownership, the casino will be remade with a tropical theme.
Contact: Charlie Leonard, (970) 927-5412

>> **ARAMARK PLOWS FORTH** – Aramark Parks and Destinations acquired Togwotee Mountain Lodge, known as North America's best snowmobile destination. The lodge, which is in close proximity to Yellowstone, will now be managed and maintained by Aramark.
Contact: Dave Freireich (215) 238-4078

>> **WRESTLING SITE NETS A MIL** – More than one million World Wrestling Entertainment fans were logging onto the WWE website this past week to register for a chance to win a cash prize call from Chairman Vince McMahon during McMahon Million Dollar Mania. The event hit an all time high during Monday's broadcast, with fans registering at about 9,000 per minute.
Contact: Alesya Opelt, (248) 543-7440

Like the timely news in this issue? Think

promoting his new creation, "Flashback - the Classic Rock Experience," the old way. He's promoting and co-promoting with venues, negotiating 80/20 merchandise deals, keeping ticket prices low and lining up classic rock radio stations as marketing partners.

The event is a flashback to the music of Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix, "the music I used to promote," and features major video and laser production along with 30 musicians on stage, many of them with some notoriety. Bowen said the idea for this "concert event" was hatched three years ago when he saw the Celine Dion production at the Colosseum in Las Vegas during a Concerts West reunion party and then attended a Trans-Siberian Orchestra holiday show at the Colonial Center in Columbia, S.C.

He decided to abandon his retirement from the music promotion business and create "Flashback," which many are also referring to as "The Mystic Orchestra," when his mind began envisioning along these lines: "What if you took all that TSO is doing and mix it with the video concept Celine had and present it with the music you were famous for presenting back in the 70s? What if Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin were on stage together? The show was born that night in my mind."

The first leg of the tour will play 8,000-10,000-seat arenas in 48-53 cities, Bowen said. Eventually, it will play about 100 cities a year. He envisions it as a perennial for arenas, coming back year after year as does TSO, but without the holiday timeframe of that group's Christmas show.

It will rehearse and open at the Mobile (Ala.) Civic Center, one of 23 SMG-managed venues on the initial route. The opening date is Aug. 27. Bowen has set a four-tiered ticket pricing scenario, generally \$57, \$37, \$27 and \$17, with a retro \$7 ticket for children under what Rainbow Ticketmaster founder and Bowen partner Lou Dickstein calls "a liberal 12," and for radio promotions. "It's exactly like the old days for me. We want that one \$7 ticket, the flashback ticket price that the radio station can promote out. They used to be \$5 in advance, \$6 day of show," Bowen said.

The average price per ticket will be \$38, but it's scaled so that "Mom and Pop and a couple kids can come for less than \$60," Bowen added.

Jay Hagerman, manager in Mobile for SMG, was among the first arena managers to jump on board when Bowen, an old friend from his own Concerts West days, called. The tech rehearsal will occupy about 10 days, followed by the opening show, which can and cannot be a good thing, he said.

"As an arena manager in a B-market, this is fantastic," Hagerman said. "We need this type of programming. We're not going to get Bruce Springsteen."

Hagerman made the call to SMG to help Bowen book a route. Bowen met with the SMG marketers during the Event & Arena Marketing Conference in Washington, D.C., and hashed out a plan. "This is going to be a visual sell," Hagerman said.

Bowen said marketing will mirror family show campaigns, starting 60 days out in most markets. He will go heavy with television, followed by radio and print. He will utilize some billboards, which make a great visual for the show. In the small markets, he expects to spend \$25,000-\$40,000 on advertising; triple that in the A-markets.

Bowen is finalizing the fall route and starting on next spring. He is booking as many "nostalgia buildings" as he can, finding the viable, well-maintained arenas that are more than 20-years-old to add to the marketing potential. In Philadelphia, for instance, he's going into the Global Spectrum-managed Wachovia Spectrum, the nostalgia building, instead of the newer Wachovia Center.

Merchandise will skew toward the high end, "no \$12 T-shirts," Bowen said. He is currently talking with potential third-party merchandisers, though his company may do it in-house. Ed

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Unitsky ("just Google him") is the creative artist. T-shirts will range from \$20-\$60; program books, \$15; "plus lanyards and miscellaneous stuff, light up flashback fans, stuff for the kids, candles."

The show production will hang 50,000-60,000 pounds. It will travel in six trucks, unless they can pare it down to five or six buses. There are 30 in the cast, 32 in the crew. There will be a huge emphasis on lasers and video. "Our laser show is costing us probably \$35,000 a week," Bowen said. "Lasers were big back in the Floyd era. Psychedelic stuff was big so we felt we wanted to put our money into that rather than firecrackers raining down sparks."

The production cost is budgeted at \$85,000 per night, Bowen told Venues Today. That does not include rent, marketing and catering. He's hoping to average 6,000-10,000 attendance per show, five shows a week. "Break even, in most markets, is 40 percent," he said. "In a 10,000-seat hall, I need 4,200-4,300 seats to break even. In smaller markets, advertising and rental costs so much less."

The initial cost of production was \$5.5 million, he said. The Mystic Orchestra "is not just five string players we pick up in every city. The orchestra is all pros, musicians who have been out with everybody from Yanni to Kanye West. The English guitar players are state of the art. We have some incredible vocalists. The music on this show is going to be jaw-dropping, like nothing you ever heard before," Bowen said.

The music director is Frank Gilcken. the Mystic Orchestra features 14 rock musicians and singers, as well as an 11-piece string-and-horn section, and includes guitarists Phil Hilborne and Jamie Humphries.

There are seven video screens to present this event/experience - "three on stage, two on the Zeppelin and two scrim screens hung over the audience. Everybody will get a good view of the video. There will be a video for each song, some themed, some vintage footage. It's like going to an IMAX show with a big orchestra behind it. The show may morph into music of the 70's, music of the 80's in three or four years. It may not be late 60s, early 70s forever."

Bowen thinks the cycle will be eight-12 years and has been advised it should play the Pacific Rim and perhaps Europe in the future.

"I would be really happy if we did anywhere in the \$16-\$20 million range," Bowen said of gross potential August to August. Things have changed since Bowen left the industry 25 years ago...or not. — Linda Deckard

Interviewed for this story: Rick Bowen, (912) 691-4990; Jay Hagerman, (251) 208-7261

July is our BIG, BAD MID-YEAR issue



- This much anticipated issue will include:
- IAAM/NAC pre-convention information
 - 2008 Venues Today Women of Influence Award Winners & bios
 - 3rd Quarter INTIX report
 - Hot Tickets & Top Stops Mid-Year Charts

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Colorado Springs World Arena & Pikes Peak Center for Performing Arts - Event Services Coordinator

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MARKETING EAMC GETS POLITICAL WITH CAPITAL CITY CONFAB



Panelists

for a session on new facilities and name changes at EAMC in Washington, D.C., include (from left) Casey Sparks of the BOK Center in Tulsa, Okla.; Brandon Lucas of Carbonhouse; Brian Gale of the Prudential Center in Newark, N.J. and Jim Delaney of Activate Sports; EAMC President Christy Ricketts of the American Airlines Center in Dallas gives the closing address at the Verizon Center in Washington D.C.



Deena Rupalo (from left) of the iWireless Center in Moline, Ill., poses with Shalimar Madrigal of the Dodge Arena in Hidalgo, Texas, and Sarah Madalinski, also from the iWireless Center; Promoter Bob Collins (from left) of World Wrestling Entertainment was honored with a lifetime achievement award at this year's conference, while Bobby Goldwater of the Goldwater Group was honored with this year's Gigi Award. Ice skating promoter Tom Collins was also honored with a lifetime achievement award.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Marketing and sales reps went home energized and ready to put their new ideas into place after a four-day Event & Arena Marketing Conference in Washington D.C. Hosted by the Verizon Center, this year's conference included a mix of marketing strategy and political discussion following the specter set over the meeting by this year's keynote speaker.

"Right now you're seeing that President Bush is having a lot of problems with his generals, but when Bill Clinton was in office, he was having trouble with his privates," joked political analyst and former Bill Clinton campaign strategist James Carville during his rousing address.

Carville's hour-long speech was part political diatribe, part question-and-answer, but his lively banter entertained the 375 attendees at this year's EAMC.

Preceding Carville's speech were lifetime achievement awards for Champions on Ice pioneer Tom Collins, as well as longtime pro-wrestling promoter Bob Collins. Tom Collins was quick to joke that the pair were brothers (they're not) during his acceptance speech, which paid tribute to the award's namesake J Lee Friedman.

"[J Lee Friedman] always said 'There is no such thing as a bad show, just a bad deal' and a key part of that saying meant the marketing support he would receive from the facilities. I am proud to say that this group represents some of the best and the brightest in marketing, promotions and advertising," Collins said.

Family shows were in full force at this year's conference – World Wrestling Entertainment hosted the opening breakfast, while VEE Corporation and Feld Entertainment sponsored separate lunches and the Harlem Globetrotters held their own evening reception at ESPN Zone to celebrate their record year with 241 events worldwide.

With the Globetrotters having such a strong breakout year, the popular question during a session on family shows was revenue expectations for marketing departments and group sales teams.

“We've looked at this from a few angles and have decided to set individualized goals for our facilities, as opposed to across the board increases,” said Tammie Weis of the Harlem Globetrotters. “We're moving closer to an emphasis on historical data and crunching the gross from past shows to get a better idea of what future ticket sales should be.”

While much of the Feld team was away at the company's summer meeting, Kim Bowers, regional director of Feld's group sales, was in attendance and said her sales team was working to encourage targeted sales tactics.

“We're telling the marketing teams not to have their hands in many different areas, but to really focus their efforts on growing portions of their markets,” Bowers said. “If they're doing well in day cares, then hone in on that market. We expect you to have good contacts and know the best way to reach those people.”

The biggest newcomers at this year's conference were the Sprint Center in Kansas City, Mo. and the Prudential Center in Newark, N.J., which opened in October with 10 concerts by Bon Jovi and sent Marketing Director Brian Gale, along with Joy Gullede and Will Carafello to the conference.

“You quickly learn the importance of archiving your history when hosting and opening like this,” said Gale, who celebrated the center's one millionth visitor in April during a New Jersey Devils National Hockey League game. “Every day and every event is a brand new moment and you really want to capture everything. Whether it's always having a house photographer on the floor or just having the right media people in the building, you want to do everything you can to preserve your history.”

And of course no EAMC event would be complete without innovative marketing ideas. Gale said the Prudential Center had introduced a personal concierge service for suite holders that could help patrons get dinner reservations in Manhattan, book car service and even plan a child's birthday party. Casey Sparks of the soon-to-open BOK Center in Tulsa, Okla., said her group sent out postcards to several facility conferences to develop awareness of the city as a touring destination, while the Charlotte Bobcats Arena minted special transit tokens with its building profile on the front.

A recurring hot topic at the conference continues to be the expansion of Internet marketing and reaching out to audiences across multiple online platforms, whether it be e-mail or social networking websites. EAMC President Christy Ricketts of the American Airlines Center in Dallas said the association has expanded its own website and has created a presence on the sites LinkedIn and Facebook.

“We're trying to regularly update our site with new information and make it a non-profit repository for the arena marketers to share information and new ideas,” she said.

Next year's conference will be held in Colorado Springs in conjunction with the World Arena. – Dave Brooks

Interviewed for this story: Tom Collins, (952) 831-2237; Tammie Weis, (602) 258-0000; Kim Bowers, (813) 623-6773; Brian Gale, (973) 757-6505; Christy Ricketts (214) 665-4218

PROMOTIONS
AMPHITHEATRE GIVES OUT GAS DISCOUNT TO BRING

FANS TO SHOWS

A New Hampshire amphitheatre is helping patrons find some relief at the pump by offering a discount equal to the price of a gallon of gas.

The Meadowbrook U.S. Cellular Pavilion in Gilford is offering discount codes to patrons for each concert ticket they purchase during the 2008 concert season. The discount is adjusted daily to match the national average for a gallon of gas, as set by website fuelgaugereport.com

Marketing Director Chris Lockwood said the discount applies to all sections of the 6,500-seat facility located on the banks of Lake Winnepesaukee. Lockwood said the discount was implemented into the facility's Speedytix ticketing system, with all discounts being subtracted from the amphitheatre's net revenue.

"It's not going to affect the amount of money that the different artists get. Hopefully we'll be able to sell more tickets by doing this to recoup whatever losses we have in the discount," Lockwood said.

The Meadowbrook U.S. Cellular Pavilion is marketing the discount through its street team with posters and other memorabilia, and plans to make a big marketing push during next week's Bike Bash, which brings 300,000 bikers to Gilford. Lockwood said the amphitheatre has five concerts planned for the Bike Bash including Lynryd Skynyrd and Foghat, ZZ Top, Brooks and Dunn, Volunteer Jam with Charlie Daniels Band, .38 Special, and Phil Lesh.

Lockwood said he recognizes that the discount isn't huge, but he believes tying it to increasing gas prices will pull at some heartstrings.

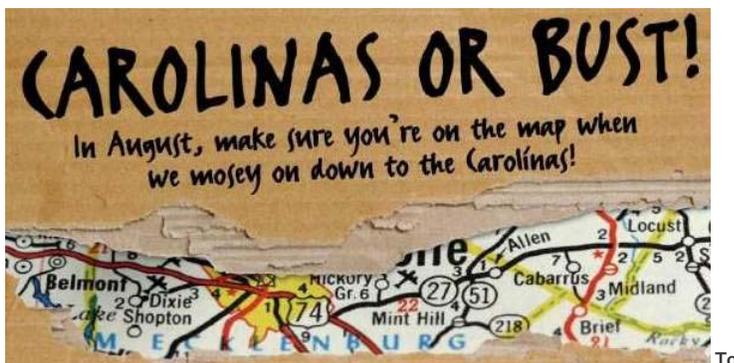
"You can tell me 'Hey I'm going to give you a \$5 discount' then I'll be like 'Eh, \$5. That's not a lot.' But everyone is so conscious about the rising price of gas that if you say to them 'We're going to give you a free gallon of gas,' even though it doesn't mean as much — a gallon of gas doesn't cost \$5 now — it seems like it's more of a reward. More of an incentive," he said. "We're just trying to tap into that mentality that gas is such a precious commodity that we're going to give you a free gallon of gas to try to get you out the door."

Meadowbrook isn't the only facility offering a gas-price discount. The Fort Myers (Fla.) Miracle Professional Baseball Club has started a "Cheaper By the Gallon" promotion that reduces a box seat ticket from \$7 to the current price of a gallon of gas, while the Minnesota Twins of Major League Baseball have also agreed to place a discount on some tickets equal to one gallon of gasoline.

Lockwood said his facility is considering other initiatives to beat high gas prices and recently installed a biodiesel station onsite to serve artists touring at the amphitheatre. He's also considering implementing a carpool incentive.

"We're still trying to figure out how it would work, but we know we won't lose any money on the deal because we currently don't charge for parking." — Dave Brooks

Interviewed for this story: Chris Lockwood, (603) 293-4700



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HOTTickets

HOT TICKETS is a weekly summary of the top acts and ticket sales as reported to VT PULSE. Following are the top 20 concerts and events, the top 5 in each seating capacity category, which took place since May 13, 2008.

CHESNEY BRINGS NFL-SIZED CROWDS TO STADIUMS

15,001 or More Seats	10,001-15,000 Seats	5,001-10,000 Seats	5,000 or Less Seats
<p>1) Kenny Chesney Gross Sales: \$3,151,970; Venue: University of Phoenix Stadium, Glendale, Ariz.; Attendance: 40,098; Ticket Range: \$105.50-\$25.50; Promoter: AEG Live, Global Spectrum, In-House, The Messina Group; Dates: May 31; No. of Shows: 1</p>	<p>1) Michael Buble Gross Sales: \$1,567,627; Venue: Brisbane (Australia) Entertainment Centre; Attendance: 9,160; Ticket Range: \$92.01-\$59.29; Promoter: Dainty Consolidated Entertainment; Dates: June 2-3; No. of Shows: 2</p>	<p>1) Las Vegas Wranglers Gross Sales: \$2,915,341; Venue: Orleans Arena, Las Vegas; Attendance: 164,551; Ticket Range: \$36.75-\$12.50; Promoter: Las Vegas Wranglers; Dates: Oct. 11, 2007- June 2, 2008; No. of Shows: 47</p>	<p>1) Cher Gross Sales: \$7,742,378; Venue: The Colosseum at Caesar's Palace, Las Vegas; Attendance: 51,040; Ticket Range: \$250-\$95; Promoter: AEG Live, Concerts West; Dates: May 13-18, 20-25, May 27-June 1; No. of Shows: 12</p>
<p>2) Kenny Chesney Gross Sales: \$3,076,852; Venue: Cleveland Browns Stadium; Attendance: 40,440; Ticket Range: \$101.50-\$51.50; Promoter: AEG Live, Cleveland Browns Stadium Company, LLC, The Messina Group; Dates: May</p>	<p>2) HBO Boxing Gross Sales: \$1,461,300; Venue: Atlantic City (N.J.) Boardwalk Hall; Attendance: 6,711; Ticket Range: \$500-\$50; Promoter: Caesars Atlantic City & Main Events, Top Rank; Dates: June 7; No. of Shows: 1</p>	<p>2) James Taylor Gross Sales: \$1,313,904; Venue: Chastain Park Amphitheatre, Atlanta; Attendance: 18,241; Ticket Range: \$75-\$38.50; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: May 24-26; No. of Shows: 3</p>	<p>2) Dane Cook Gross Sales: \$1,100,063; Venue: The Colosseum at Caesar's Palace, Las Vegas; Attendance: 10,583; Ticket Range: \$175-\$75; Promoter: AEG Live, Concerts West; Dates: May 23-25; No. of Shows: 3</p>
<p>3) Kenny Chesney, LeAnn</p>	<p>3) Pepe Aguilar Gross Sales: \$916,315; Venue:</p>	<p>3) Eddie Izzard Gross Sales:</p>	

24; No. of Shows: 1	Rimes Gross Sales: \$1,220,404; Venue: Van Andel Arena, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Attendance: 22,264; Ticket Range: \$69.50-\$27; Promoter: AEG Live, Mischell Productions, The Messina Group; Dates: May 21-22; No. of Shows: 2	Gibson Amphitheatre at Universal CityWalk, Universal City, Calif.; Attendance: 10,529; Ticket Range: \$155-\$55; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: May 16-17; No. of Shows: 2	\$600,798; Venue: Chicago Theatre; Attendance: 10,564; Ticket Range: \$72-\$50; Promoter: Westbeth Entertainment; Dates: May 15-17; No. of Shows: 3
3) Roger Waters Gross Sales: \$2,568,652; Venue: The O2 Arena, London, England; Attendance: 29,825; Ticket Range: \$108.12-\$44.23; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: May 18-19; No. of Shows: 2	4) Tom Petty Gross Sales: \$916,388; Venue: Van Andel Arena, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Attendance: 11,697; Ticket Range: \$99.50-\$55; Promoter: AEG Live, Concerts West; Dates: May 30; No. of Shows: 1	4) Roberto Carlos Gross Sales: \$479,760; Venue: The WaMu Theater at Madison Square Garden, New York; Attendance: 5,464; Ticket Range: \$160-\$60; Promoter: Evenpro; Dates: May 23; No. of Shows: 1	4) Sweeney Todd Gross Sales: \$561,922; Venue: Fox Theatre, Atlanta; Attendance: 13,774; Ticket Range: \$55-\$19; Promoter: Broadway Across America; Dates: May 27-June 1; No. of Shows: 8
4) Chris Rock Gross Sales: \$2,401,328; Venue: The O2 Arena, London, England; Attendance: 34,604; Ticket Range: \$97.30-\$78.63; Promoter: Phil McIntyre Promotions; Dates: May 23-24; No. of Shows: 2	5) Ilya Averbukh's Russian Ice Show Gross Sales: \$507,385; Venue: Atlantic City (N.J.) Boardwalk Hall; Attendance: 5,159; Ticket Range: \$250-\$50; Promoter: VNM Entertainment; Dates: May 31; No. of Shows: 1	5) Duran Duran Gross Sales: \$434,944; Venue: Chastain Park Amphitheatre, Atlanta; Attendance: 5,414; Ticket Range: \$88-\$38; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: May 17; No. of Shows: 1	5) Leonard Cohen Gross Sales: \$404,296; Venue: Rebecca Cohn Auditorium at Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia; Attendance: 4,981; Ticket Range: \$101.55-\$75.66; Promoter: Goldenvoice, Rubin Fogel; Dates: May 12-17; No. of Shows: 5

Compiled by Rob Ocampo. To submit reports, e-mail HotTickets@venuestoday.com or fax to (714) 378-0040.

THE BEAT

CONSTRUCTION

The NBA Finals are heating up both coasts, while the Detroit Red Wings are celebrating their 11th Stanley Cup victory in the NHL. In honor of both sports, we present a look at the new venues the leagues have under construction:

Barclays Center, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Scheduled opening: 2010

Tenant/Ownership: New Jersey Nets/Forest City Enterprises

Architect: Frank Gehry

Capacity: 25,000, variable configuration

Construction Cost: \$950 million for the arena, part of a \$4 billion sports, business and residential complex

Financing: Goldman Sachs, New York City and New York State subsidies.

Construction Update: In mid-May, Nets Sports and Entertainment opened a luxury suite showroom in the New York Times building in Manhattan to spur sales and build collateral to gain construction financing so they can break ground on the 19,000-seat Barclays Center, part of the \$4 billion Atlantic Yards project, later this year.

But they face some tough challenges, as the economy falters.



"The slowdown in the economy is a significant problem on a number of levels," said Marc Ganis, president of Sportscorp, Ltd., a Chicago-marketing firm.

"Construction costs have put the price of the project in a stratosphere never known for arenas. The slowdown also impacts real estate - the residential and retail elements of Atlantic Yards. The carrying costs are significant."

On top of increased costs, the Nets face court time - and not in the NBA play-offs. An environmental challenge to Atlantic Yards will make its way through the appellate court this summer.

The opening of the showroom has also been overshadowed by a push from New Jersey officials and New Jersey Devils owner Jeff Vanderbeek, who are trying to find investors to buy the Nets and move the team to the Prudential Center in Newark instead.

The Nets are unlikely to stay at the Izod Center longer than necessary - the team lost \$40 million last year, and does not have playoff income to rely on this year.

But owner, developer Bruce Ratner sees the 19,000-seat Barclays Center as a critical part of Atlantic Yards and is unlikely to sell, experts said.

"The Nets are committed," said Ganis.

The Nets are moving ahead with financing. The team has a record-setting naming rights deal - \$20 million annually - with the British bank, Barclays. And so far, the Nets have signed \$100 million in "founding partners," including Anheuser-Busch, Foxwoods Resort Casino and Cushman and Wakefield.

"If they time the cycle right, and they finish construction as the economy comes back, they will be well positioned with lots of products," Ganis said.

Contact: Peter Truell, (212) 412-7576, Marc Ganis, (312) 649-9200

New Pittsburgh Arena

Scheduled Opening: 2010

Tenant/Ownership: Pittsburgh Penguins (NHL)/Sports and Exhibition Authority of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County

Architect: HOK Sport

Capacity: 18,500

Construction Cost: \$290 million

Financing: The Penguins have agreed to pay \$3.8 million per year for construction, plus \$400,000 annually for capital improvements

Construction Update: The once-bankrupt Penguins franchise made its first Stanley Cup Finals since 1999, but they have another reason to celebrate. HOK Sport's plans for the new 18,500-seat arena adjacent to the Hill district won unanimous approval from the Pittsburgh city planning commission in early May.

The multi-use arena will be home to the Penguins and may host an Arena Football League expansion team. They also expect to host 150 other events annually. Plans include luxury boxes, a retail area and 2.5 acres of green space around the venue. The team is working with the Pittsburgh Technology Council to "future proof" the facility, and explore advances like on-demand televised replays, touch screen food menus in the luxury boxes, and video gaming stations. In Phase 2 of the project, a retail and entertainment district may be developed on abutting property. Aramark has a 10-year contract to provide food, beverage and retail merchandise services to the venue. Aramark has worked with the Penguins since 1991.

"While the site - with its 90-foot-slope from end to end - was a challenge, it did present beautiful views into one of the most dramatic downtown vistas in our country," said Wayne London, HOK Sport project manager, in a statement. "We created an arena that not only capitalizes on those views, but also one that responds to its neighborhood in terms of form and scale."

Construction is expected to begin this summer, with the Penguins moving in by the start of the 2010 season. - Liz Boardman

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FOOD REPORT
NBA FINALS GAMES 1, 2 AND 3



June 5, June 8 and June 10

T.D. Banknorth Garden, Boston, and Staples Center, Los Angeles

Concessionaires: Delaware North Sportservice for T.D. Banknorth Garden and Levy Restaurants for Staples Center

Event Attendance: The entire Celtics season, including Games 1 and 2, was sold out with a capacity of 18,624, and Game 3 in Los Angeles had an attendance of 18,997.

Specialty Items on the main concourse levels: Each venue developed special menus that catered to the tastes of its guests. In Boston, specialty items available on the main concourse level included sliced-to-order corned beef and brisket sandwiches, New England lobster rolls, fried clams baskets and homemade gelato for dessert.

In Los Angeles, food was made all about the Lakers by serving themed lemonade and margaritas with purple-sugared rims, and their signature Lakers Dog: a Big Dawg served with pastrami, mustard and purple onions.

Suites: T.D. Banknorth Garden's menu for the suites was filled with comfort food, including turkey pot pies, baked Brie En Croute, regional cheese platters, New England clam chowder, teriyaki-glazed steak tips, homemade cannelloni and crême brulee.

At the Staples Center, Levy Restaurants had diverse offerings available to the suites. The "Playing till June" menu included finger foods such as "Popcornopolis": gourmet white, cheddar, zebra and cinnamon toast popcorn, and wing samplers. Also available were mini Creole crab burgers, Char Sui turkey sandwiches and blackened tomahawk ribeye. The "Return to Glory" menu included sashimi of halibut, California cheeses and charcuterie, braised Kobe short rib, seared cold-water lobster tail medallions, and dessert choices such as smoky chocolate cake and roasted apricots.

Preparation: The Garden staff brought additional culinary and front of house support to help prepare for the Finals. "This was to accommodate the private catering events and increased media in the building," said Sportservice General Manager for the T.D. Banknorth Garden Michael Zielinski.

The Staples Center culinary staff spent three weeks planning menus, guest enhancements, staffing grids, production meetings and purchasing guides. "Many early mornings and late nights were and are being had," said Executive Chef Matthew Herter at the Staples Center for Levy Restaurants.

Regional Differences: While both venues offered an array of well-prepared food choices, being on opposite sides of the country played a role in their menus and presentation.

"There is a higher expectation for food quality and presentation that we need to measure up to based on the reputation for culinary excellence in the region," Zielinski said of Boston. He also explained that event planners expect to see traditional New England foods, reflected in the choices of New England clam chowder, lobster rolls and fried clams baskets.

For the Staples Center, Herter said, "Los Angeles clientele offers us the opportunity to push the culinary envelope. Each one of our Levy Restaurants venues will feature local favorites to ensure our guests have the best possible and unique experience."

The Southern California landscape allowed Levy Restaurants to offer foods such as sushi, steaks, prawns and a variety of produce. "Our clientele also appreciate fine wines from across California," Herter added.

Commemorative items: Boston did not have any commemorative foodservice items. The Staples Center is selling commemorative logo beverage containers during the remainder of the games in Los Angeles.

Staffing: For each game, T.D. Banknorth Garden had in excess of 650 staff line associates, which included concessions, premium and suite areas, restaurants and retail. Game 3 at the Staples Center used about 875 of the Levy Restaurants staff.

Popular Items: The Garden's most popular items were the fan-favorite hot dog and draft beer and the Staples Center's most popular choices included popcorn and cotton candy in the Lakers' colors.

Final Thoughts: Although the Celtics-Lakers rivalry is very much alive, the foodservice at both the Garden and the Staples Center faced very similar challenges.

"[The biggest challenge was] accommodating last minute events that pop-up the day-of for high-profile clients," Zielinski said. "And developing menus with new clients that have specific culinary requests from out of region within their operating budgets."

When asked about obstacles and challenges that the staff at the Staples Center faced, Herter cited "dealing with last-minute special requests from our guests while orchestrating all the moving pieces of such a large scale, high-profile event and being certain that we are delivering heartfelt hospitality at every opportunity."

As for things that went well, Zielinski said that their New England clam and lobster bake received rave reviews on opening night in Boston. For the Staples Center, Regional Director of Marketing Patti Green said, "We feel that everything ran smoothly - especially with the Lakers victory!"

While neither Herter nor Green mentioned that they needed to make any improvements for next year, when asked the same question, Zielinski replied enthusiastically, "More home games." – Linda Domingo

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