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From: venuestoday [venuestoday@mail.vresp.com]
Sent: Wednesday, September 24, 2008 6:10 PM
To: april@venuestoday.com
Subject: VT Pulse, Sept. 24, 2008



VT PULSE

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION FROM VENUES TODAY

September 24, 2008 • VOL. VII, Number 29 • ISSN 1547-4143

Quote of the Week

"On the day of the announcement to introduce the launch of the state quarter on the grounds, I got in the car and heard on the radio that she was in Ohio, being introduced as McCain's vice presidential candidate, so the lieutenant governor stood in for her."

— Alaska State Fair General Manager Ray Ritari on Republican Vice Presidential Nominee Sarah Palin.

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Greetings April,

Welcome to VT Pulse, your weekly guide to the "News Behind the Headlines. The staff is busy finalizing the October issue and we will not be publishing VT Pulse next Wednesday. Check your inbox on Oct. 8 for the 30th issue of VT Pulse.

SEVT

Sport Entertainment & Venues Tomorrow

The early registration discount deadline has been extended through Oct. 12

REGISTER NOW!

You won't want to miss this conference. SEVT is a unique gathering of diverse talents to discuss and debate the future of an industry, from the perspective of STUDENTS, PROFESSIONALS and PROFESSORS.



Claire Rothman will be honored as the 2008 Lifetime Achievement Award Winner for her contributions to the industry as an arena manager at the Forum, Inglewood, Calif. and the Spectrum, Philadelphia.

Speakers to include:

- ◊Lee Zeidman, senior VP and general manager, AEG-Staples Center/Nokia Theatre/L.A. Live
- ◊Peter Luukko, president, Comcast Spectacor
- ◊Terry Barnes, chairman, Ticketmaster
- ◊Mike Wooley, associate principal, HOK
- ◊Sean Pate, director of marketing, StubHub
- ◊Mike deMaine, general manager, Greenville Drive
- ◊Roddy White, director of event marketing and client services, Atlanta Falcons
- ◊Dr. Chris Greenwell, Univ. of Louisville
- ◊Dr. Rob Ammon, Slippery Rock Univ.
- ◊Dr. Ron Dick, Duquense Univ.

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SHORT TAKES

>> THE GARDEN PLANS NEW LUXURY SPACE — The TD Banknorth Garden in Boston is planning to create five new hospitality and seating areas for the 2008/09 season. Formerly known as Banners Restaurant, this area has undergone a complete renovation and reprogramming estimated in value at \$4 million. The project includes luxury seating areas, lounge and raw bar, a corporate event suite, a reinvented and relocated Banners restaurant, and new function room.

Contact: *Trisha McCorkle, (617) 624-1854*

>> KENT SIGNS WITH SAVOR — The soon-to-be opened Kent (Wash.) Events Center has signed on with Savor... for food and beverage services at the 6,500-seat arena, home to the Seattle Thunderbirds Hockey Team. Tim Higgins will manage Savor operations, which include 20-suites, a full service restaurant and concessions.

Contact: *Melissa Brown, (562) 499-7630*



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...and many many more.

REGISTER NOW!

VT NEWS

DEALS CENTERPLATE SOLD TO INVESTORS GROUP FOR NEAR \$200 MIL



Centerplate

After much speculation and rumor, concessionaire Centerplate has announced "that it has signed a definitive merger agreement with an affiliate of Kohlberg & Company, a private equity firm, to be acquired in an all cash transaction. The Board of Directors of Centerplate has unanimously approved the transaction."

That announcement came on Sept. 18. Centerplate provides concessions, catering and merchandise services in more than 130 sports facilities, convention centers and other entertainment venues throughout the United States and Canada. Kohlberg "merged" with Centerplate by combining a number of stock and bond options, in effect buying the company.

"The transaction is worth between \$185-\$200 million," said Gael Doar, Centerplate's director of communications. "Kohlberg will assume some of our debt and they want 70 percent of the notes, which are the bonds."

At this early stage of the process, it is hard to say how this agreement will impact Centerplate. Doar said the name of the company will remain intact and all senior management are expected to stay in place.

"Centerplate will continue to offer the high level of service it always has," Doar said. "We don't expect any of our contracts to be renegotiated. Some do have a clause which allows for this, but we don't expect any."

News of the sale released Sept. 19 stated, "Under the terms of the agreement, the transaction will be accomplished through a debt tender for up to 70 percent of the notes and a merger in which 100 percent of the company's common stock will be acquired. Each unit holder who tenders the notes underlying their units will receive \$3.99 for each note tendered, subject to proration if more than 70 percent of the notes are tendered. At the closing of the merger, each unit holder will also receive \$0.01 per share for the common stock underlying their units for a total payment to IDS holders of \$4 per unit. This represents a premium of approximately 33 percent over Centerplate's closing price today."

Doar said, also under the agreement, Centerplate will still have 30 percent of the notes that are not tendered — "that will be our debt."

"Our debt will be about \$35.9 million in subordinated notes," she said. "That is due in 2013."

At the time of the announcement, David Williams, chairman of the board of Centerplate, said, "In May of this year we initiated a formal process to identify the best structure to give Centerplate the flexibility to strengthen the company and maximize value for unit holders."

"The process has been extensive and we have thoroughly reviewed a number of alternatives," Williams said. "Given the realities of the economic environment and tight credit markets, we are confident that we have found the best available outcome for our unit holders and the company."

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 - Executive Director

Acer Arena, Sydney, Australia
 - Assistant Technical Manager

Prudential Center, Newark, NJ
 - Conversion Manager

Telstra Dome, Melbourne, Australia
 - Parking Services Coordinator

Janet Steinmayer, president and CEO of Centerplate, said she was pleased to join Kohlberg and Company. She said the agreement, "will provide important benefits for unit holders, clients, employees and other stakeholders."

The transaction is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2009.

Industry experts agreed that Centerplate's financial problems weren't necessarily a reflection of the current economic climate or changes that have taken place within this industry over the last years.

"This is not something that has happened overnight," said Chris Bigelow, Bigelow Companies, Kansas City, Mo., a company which provides consulting services for clients needing expertise in the food and merchandise field.

"Centerplate, and, before that, Volume Services, had been very profitable over the years," Bigelow said. "It has been bought and sold several times over the years. If the new group had to borrow money to purchase the company, then the debt kept carrying over."

Centerplate did lose its largest account this year, the soon-to-be opened New York Yankees Stadium, where the contract expires at the end of 2009. The Yankees have decided to take their operations in-house. It is a big loss for Centerplate.

But, the company just started its operations in August at the Indianapolis Colts' new house, the Lucas Oil Stadium. It added the Indiana State Museum, the Indianapolis Zoo and the Murat Centre at the first of the year. It has been reported that these contracts represent \$12 million in annual revenues.

It began operations at the Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, in August.

Aside from the Colts, it holds contracts for 10 other NFL stadiums. It holds contracts at seven Major League Baseball facilities.

Bigelow said the terms of the agreement seemed very complicated.

"And, it also appears to mean they are just adding more debt, which is their problem in the first place," he said. — Pam Sherborne

Interviewed for this article: Gael Doar, (203) 975-5941; Chris Bigelow, (816) 483-5553



MARKETING GRAPHICS PERSONALIZE SUITE BRANDING EXPERIENCE

Flexcon's Mike Chevalier adds perspective to the company's Greg Oden graphic.

carbonhouse, inc.,
Charlotte, N.C. -
Client Services
Manager, Sports &
Entertainment

Comcast Arena at
Everett (Wash) -
Event Manager

Hartman Arena,
Park City, KS - Box
Office Manager

Central Coast
Mariners Football
Club, Chittaway
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- Membership &
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Ltd, New Zealand -
CEO

[VIEW THE FULL
LISTINGS](#)



Guests to the Portland (Ore.) Trail Blazer's marketing suite at the Rose Garden Arena know they have arrived in the right place. A lifesize portrait of the 2007 top draft pick Greg Oden greets visitors at suite level. Red, white and black team colors are emblazoned on the counter tops and floors - even in the closets. A basketball design wraps around the trashcans, and there is a lane and free-throw line around the toilet in the bathroom.

"We like to be out there, and we have a sense of humor. We wanted it to feel like they are in the Trail Blazer's suite, not a generic suite," said Traci Richardson, senior director of marketing.

So instead of hanging up some memorabilia and calling it a day, the Trail Blazers used Suite-art to brand the space.

Suite-art is a wide-format digital image printed on a pressure sensitive material like polypropylene, polyester or magnet. It was developed by Flexcon, a Massachusetts-based company that specializes in pressure sensitive films and adhesives.

Images can be printed on opaque films for solid surfaces and clear for windows. Flexcon offers a variety of materials for installation on walls, floors, concrete or carpet. If the suite owners share a suite, or want to impress a particular customer for a single visit, they can opt for Receptamag, a magnetic product that can be easily put up and taken down.

"Instead of a blank box, it is a branded canvas," said Michael Chevalier, new business development manager for Flexcon. He said venues and teams are using the product in three different ways.

"It is a renewal tool; a new revenue source, with the venues charging the base price plus an up charge; and they let interested suite holders contact Flexcon directly," he said.

Flexcon provides a brochure that can be private labeled so teams and venues can use it to sell their clients on the concept.

At prices running from \$5,000 to \$12,000 per suite, some venues also see the product as an inexpensive way to give their suites a facelift, Chevalier said.

To customize, venues decide which zones to focus on - walls, floor, window and counter - the more zones, the higher the price. At the lower range, the Décor platform offers an affordable way to establish a brand presence with venue or team colors in one zone, leaving open the option of additional customization at suite holder expense. The mid-range Professional platform is more visually dynamic, covering at least two zones. At the high-end, Max Impact covers all four zones.

"With the Max program, they have all walls and floors covered, and they are changing out graphics," Chevalier said. "It is used as a renewal tool. When the brands see it, they know what to do with it."

The Cincinnati Reds used Suite-Art for their marketing suite, using an image of the old Cinergy Stadium on one wall, and opening day at Great American Ballpark on the other. They also created a sponsorship wall with major sponsors' logos, and team logos on each seat and underfoot, as a kick plate.

"We are doing lots of quotes on the kick plates," Chevalier said. "Everyone sees those as they are watching the game."

Venues are also moving Suite-art into other parts of the stadium, to create zones in the concourses, concessions and entryways. The images are photographic quality, so the colors can be matched to exact PMS numbers.

"When we spoke with owners, they told us the colors must match perfectly, because upper level management and CEOs will be visiting the suites, standing next to the graphics," Chevalier said.

The choice of base material depends on where the image will be located. Floor, carpet and concrete labels are overlaminated to protect the image and create a non-skid surface. While most are intended to be in place for years, Flexcon offers Receptamag as a removable option.

"Anybody can stick it up and pull it down," said Lori Bitar, technical service representative for Flexcon. "There is no liner, no tackiness. For a shared suite or special customer, they can keep the graphic, roll it up into a tube, and reapply when they want."

As for print quality, digital printing is photographic quality, and the graphics are usually swapped out before they fade, Chevalier said.

He said the initial decision of where to apply the graphics can be long, but after an order is placed, and artwork is approved - the longest part of the print process - one of four regional printers does the printing and sends out installers to make sure the images go on the surfaces without bubbling - another thing CEOs do not like to see. Installation typically takes four to eight hours.

Chevalier said the work typically goes on the walls five to seven days after the artwork is approved.

Richardson said the Trail Blazers have found benefits they had not intended.

"When you enter the suite level, you can see Greg Oden's photograph, and want to know how tall you are next to him," she said. "Everyone ducks in to have their picture taken there. It created an interactive way of experiencing the team, rather than his image looking at them from a wall. This allowed us to fully integrate branding without memorabilia." — Liz Boardman

Interviewed for this article: Mike Chevalier & Lori Bitar, (508) 885-8372; Traci Richardson, (503) 849-0977.

HOT Tickets

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 Sept. 2, 2008.

UFC PUTS SUBMISSION HOLD ON HOTLANTA

| 15,001 or More Seats | 10,001-15,000 Seats | 5,001-10,000 Seats | 5,000 or Less Seats |
|--|--|--|---|
| 1) Ultimate Fighting Championships Gross Sales: \$2,595,129; | 1) Elton John Gross Sales: \$1,579,228; Venue: Credit Union Centre , | 1) Cirque du Soleil - Saltimbanco Gross Sales: \$769,121; Venue: | 1) The Phantom of the Opera Gross Sales: \$3,409,505; Venue: Keller |

Venue: **Philips Arena, Atlanta;**
Attendance: 14,744; Ticket Range: \$604-\$79; Promoter: UFC; Dates: Sept. 6; No. of Shows: 1

2) **Elton John**
Gross Sales: \$1,903,328; Venue: **Pengrowth Saddledome, Calgary, Alberta;**
Attendance: 16,789; Ticket Range: \$141.78-\$75.17; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Sept. 12; No. of Shows: 1

3) **Elton John**
Gross Sales: \$1,810,131; Venue: **Rexall Place, Edmonton, Alberta;**
Attendance: 16,208; Ticket Range: \$141.78-\$75.17; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Sept. 13; No. of Shows: 1

4) **Neil Diamond**
Gross Sales: \$1,196,378; Venue: **General Motors Place, Vancouver, British Columbia;**
Attendance: 13,845; Ticket Range: \$115.87-\$53.08; Promoter: AEG Live, Concerts West; Dates: Sept. 20; No. of Shows: 1

5) **Neil Diamond**
Gross Sales: \$1,128,511; Venue: **Rexall Place, Edmonton, Alberta;**
Attendance: 12,999; Ticket Range: \$115.87-\$53.08; Promoter: AEG Live, Concerts West; Dates: Sept. 16; No. of Shows: 1

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan;
Attendance: 12,966; Ticket Range: \$141.78-\$75.17; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Sept. 15; No. of Shows: 1

2) **Neil Diamond**
Gross Sales: \$939,304; Venue: **MTS Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba;**
Attendance: 11,056; Ticket Range: \$115.87-\$53.08; Promoter: AEG Live, Concerts West; Dates: Sept. 14; No. of Shows: 1

3) **Janet Jackson**
Gross Sales: \$537,970; Venue: **San Diego (Calif.) Sports Arena;**
Attendance: 5,500; Ticket Range: \$250-\$50; Promoter: AEG Live; Dates: Sept. 20; No. of Shows: 1

4) **Blue Man Group**
Gross Sales: \$385,858; Venue: **John Labatt Centre, London, Ontario;**
Attendance: 6,795; Ticket Range: \$81.16-\$52.51; Promoter: Emery Entertainment; Dates: Sept. 18; No. of Shows: 1

5) **Maroon 5**
Gross Sales: \$236,814; Venue: **Journal Pavilion, Albuquerque, N.M.;**
Attendance: 9,214; Ticket Range: \$125-\$29.50; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Sept. 9; No. of Shows: 1

Sovereign Bank Arena, Trenton, N.J.; Attendance: 9,971; Ticket Range: \$96.50-\$41.50; Promoter: Cirque du Soleil; Dates: Sept. 17-20; No. of Shows: 7

2) **Hoodie Awards**
Gross Sales: \$637,577; Venue: **Orleans Arena, Las Vegas;**
Attendance: 6,933; Ticket Range: \$99-\$79; Promoter: NuOpp, Inc.; Dates: Sept. 20; No. of Shows: 1

3) **Alejandro Fernandez**
Gross Sales: \$468,993; Venue: **Gibson Amphitheatre at Universal CityWalk, Universal City, Calif.;**
Attendance: 5,900; Ticket Range: \$250.50-\$60.50; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Sept. 11; No. of Shows: 1

4) **Al Green, Gladys Knight**
Gross Sales: \$397,980; Venue: **Greek Theatre, Los Angeles;**
Attendance: 5,060; Ticket Range: \$100-\$45; Promoter: Nederlander; Dates: Sept. 20; No. of Shows: 1

5) **The Raconteurs**
Gross Sales: \$384,770; Venue: **Greek Theatre, Los Angeles;**
Attendance: 9,247; Ticket Range: \$45-\$40; Promoter: Nederlander; Dates: Sept. 22-23; No. of Shows: 2

Auditorium, Portland, Ore.;
Attendance: 63,123; Ticket Range: \$81.50-\$28; Promoter: Fred Meyer Broadway Across America
Portland; Dates: Aug. 31-Sept. 7; No. of Shows: 32

2) **Paris By Night**
Gross Sales: \$429,460; Venue: **Long Beach (Calif.) Terrace Theater;**
Attendance: 5,828; Ticket Range: \$150-\$30; Promoter: Thuy Nga; Dates: Sept. 20-21; No. of Shows: 2

3) **Bob Dylan**
Gross Sales: \$240,470; Venue: **Santa Monica (Calif.) Civic Auditorium;**
Attendance: 3,460; Ticket Range: \$69.50; Promoter: Nederlander; Dates: Sept. 3; No. of Shows: 1

4) **Willie Nelson**
Gross Sales: \$236,434; Venue: **Santa Barbara (Calif.) Bowl;**
Attendance: 3,502; Ticket Range: \$78-\$49; Promoter: Nederlander; Dates: Sept. 6; No. of Shows: 1

5) **George Lopez**
Gross Sales: \$235,762; Venue: **Fox Theatre, Detroit;**
Attendance: 3,996; Ticket Range: \$59.50-\$49.50; Promoter: Jam Productions, Outback Concerts; Dates: Sept. 20; No. of Shows: 1

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

THE BEAT

FAIRS & FESTIVALS

ALASKA STATE FAIR, PALMER

Everythings looks great in 3D at the Alaska State Fair in Palmer; Country-music fans sing along.



Attendance: 300,000, on par with last year

Aug. 21-Sept. 1

The Alaska State Fair opened with Gov. Sarah Palin participating in a ceremony to celebrate 50 years of statehood, and concluded with her missing the introduction of the Alaska quarter because she was otherwise engaged - in Ohio being introduced as Sen. John McCain's Republican running mate.

"On the day of the announcement to introduce the launch of the state quarter on the grounds, I got in the car and heard on the radio that she was in Ohio, being introduced as McCain's vice presidential candidate, so the lieutenant governor stood in for her," said fair general manager Ray Ritari.

Concerts: Ritari projects that parking and gate revenues will be flat with last year's, but concert revenues were up an "exceptional" 42 percent.

The fair books acts in-house with Petaluma, Calif.-based Wilson Events, to play the 3,800-seat Borealis Theater, an amphitheater. Jamaican rapper/reggae artist Sean Kingston drew the largest audience, and comedian/ventriloquist Terry Fator came in second, although no one was a sell-out.

Other acts included Tracy Lawrence, Kansas, Emerson Drive, Dr. Ralph Stanley, Mickey Dolenz of the Monkees, the Charlie Daniels Band, the Gin Blossoms and the Rembrandts, the Mayday Parade Rock Show, and Hobo Jim and his Nashville All-Star Band.

The talent budget was \$500,000 and tickets ranged from \$20 to \$60, compared to a top price of \$45 last year. "It's tied to the costs of the act," Ritari said. "We had better entertainment and more of it, so we priced accordingly."

Getting acts to the fair requires some compensation for travel and time. It generally turns out to be a three-day trip. "We recognize the fact that when the entertainers come up here, it's a busy time of year and it takes them a day to get up here and a day to come back. We really appreciate their willingness to come up here. And I'll also say, our crowds were extremely appreciative."

Carnival: Anchorage-based Golden Wheel Amusements provided 25 rides for the midway and was up 11 percent, Ritari said. The pay-one-price ride wristbands cost \$25, while admission prices to the fair were \$10 for adults and \$6 for ages 17 and under.

Spending: Alaska has remained largely untouched by economic problems and home foreclosures, Ritari said. "Tourism was hit a bit this year, but oil and gas exploration and production is probably the largest employer here and that has a significant impact," he said. Also, Alaskans received an oil revenue dividend check this year of \$3,200.

Sponsorships: Up to \$500,000 from cash and in-kind participants, from last year's \$350,000. Part of that came from the Target chain store, which will be opening stores in Alaska in October for the first time. The sponsorship included pinwheels and suckers giveaways, the Target dog appearance and fireworks.

Parking: \$5 and greatly improved. "We were able to get everyone on the site with no more than a 20-minute wait," Ritari said.

2009 dates: Although the fair traditionally ends on Labor Day, Ritari is holding off on setting next year's dates. "I think we need to have a discussion about going to another weekend," he said. "It's way too early to say that's the plan. We need to study the situation." - Mary Wade Burnside

Interviewed for this article: Ray Ritari, (907) 745-4827

NEBRASKA STATE FAIR, LINCOLN

Corn contest in the exhibit hall; the midway at the Nebraska State Fair.



Attendance: 309,137, up three percent from 299,175 last year

Aug. 22-Sept. 1

This is the fifth consecutive attendance increase for Nebraska State Fair, which struggled prior to being saved with lottery funds. "That's a huge plus to look back and say, 'Hey, the pendulum has stayed to the positive side,'" GM Barney Cosner said.

Carnival: Jim Murphy's Tampa-based Mighty Blue Grass Shows was a bit up.

Admission: The full price was \$8, but Monday through Friday before 5 p.m., patrons could get in for \$5. Patrons also could take advantage of on-line deals that gave them \$6 weekend admission.

Concerts: Free shows take place in an open-air pavilion that seats up to 3,000 and can accommodate up to 6,000. Acts included Miranda Lambert; Lori Morgan and Tracy Byrd; BoyzIIMen; Survivor and Starship with Mickey Thomas; Third Day; Nitty Gritty Dirt Band; and Styx.

"I think in most cases, it was pretty well filled," Cosner said. "I would say Miranda Lambert did an incredible job to get us started, and BoyzIIMen were very good, too. And Styx, of course, got a huge crowd."

Marketing: The marketing budget rose from last year's \$225,000 to \$275,000, mostly in an effort to saturate the Omaha market and bring in a more urban crowd. That also will be a factor beginning with the 2010 fair, which will take place in a new location, Fonner Park in Grand Island, Neb., 100 miles west of Lincoln and a much more rural location.

The fair also launched a new Web site, designed by Ntelligent Systems in Irvine, Calif. "It's more user-friendly and we've got lots of plans to increase it," Cosner said. "It had a 'plan your day at the fair' function and it also had an event locator on it, and some other new things we have not had in the past."

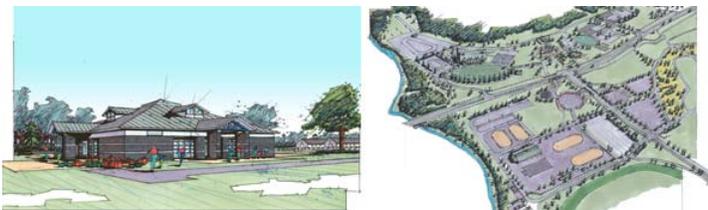
2009 dates: Aug. 28-Sept. 7, the last fair at Lincoln Park. - Mary Wade Burnside

Interviewed for this story: Barney Cosner, (402) 474-5371

DEALS

SMG TO WORK WITH SFVA AT THE MEADOW EVENT PARK

Renderings of the Meadow Event Park in Doswell, Va.



Meadow Event Park, Doswell, Va.

Consultant: SMG and Savor

Terms: The State Fair of Virginia, Richmond, has hired SMG to provide pre-opening consulting and ongoing event booking, marketing and food and beverage services to SFVA and The Meadow Event Park it is building in Caroline County for the next five years. Savor will provide catering and food service. The entire complex opens with the 2009 State Fair of Virginia Sept. 24-Oct. 4.

The \$81 million equestrian and conference center, home to the 1973 Triple Crown winner Secretariat, includes new construction and redevelopment of existing facilities, including The Americraft Pavilion (10,000-sq.-ft. multi-purpose facility),

The Farm Bureau Center (75,000-sq.-ft. exhibition hall), the Union Bank & Trust Hall (high-end executive conference center), the Southern States Legends Stable, and four equine show rings.

“It’s an interesting project within our company because it does just about touch every discipline we have,” said SMG’s Mike Evans, who added that his own sports and entertainment department is probably the least impacted at this point. However, he is well connected in Virginia with venues like the John Paul Jones Arena, Charlottesville, and he presented SMG’s services to fair managers at the International Association of Fairs & Expositions.

Curry Roberts, SFVA president, heard that panel in Las Vegas last year and called. “He is very focused on the business aspect,” Evans said.

The State Fair of Virginia is currently on the site of the Richmond Motor Speedway. Moving to a new grounds gives SFVA the chance to “blow people away” with a cohesive layout, versus the usual piecemeal fairgrounds expansion that meshes architectural styles and practicality, Evans said.

In the future plans, there’s an amphitheater for the state fair, where Evans’ booking skills will come into play.

Lisa Williams, who runs SMG’s equestrian facilities, is intricately involved. Bob McClintock and Gregg Caren, from the convention center division, are there, as is the food division. The operation will report to SMG’s convention center division, Evans said. “It’s so different, state fairs. We recognized that from the beginning. It’s not booking, not operations, this is different.”

That diversity of talents at SMG appealed to Roberts. He predicts The Meadow Event Park will host 100-plus events annually in addition to the fair. “It is not a single purpose facility,” he said. “There is nothing that is not flexible.”

Bullock Smith designed the venue, which will be built in three phases.

Bookings already include the Highland Games, which draw 20,000 over two days. — Linda Deckard

Interviewed for this story: Mike Evans, (215) 592-6640; Curry Roberts, (804) 569-3247

APEX MERGES WITH INFINITE SECURITY

Terms: The Apex Group, sister company to Contemporary Services Corp., has merged with Infinite Security, Dallas, and Infinite’s owner, Larry Wansley, becomes an owner and partner in Apex. The transaction in combined stocks and cash is worth over \$500,000, said Damon Zumwalt, president of CSC.

Venue managers are familiar with Apex, which specializes in executive security management, event services and accreditation services. Often, Apex will hire off-duty officers to provide additional security where CSC is handling event staffing and crowd control.

Zumwalt noted Wansley’s credentials are key to this transaction. He is currently director of security for the Dallas Cowboys of the National Football League. He was one of the FBI’s first deep undercover agents and spent a decade with the Bureau before beginning his career with the Cowboys. He worked overseas for the NFL’s International League, later known as NFL Europe. He was also worldwide managing director of corporate security for American Airlines. — Linda Deckard

Interviewed for this story: Damon Zumwalt, (818) 885-5150

ON THE MENU

U.S. OPEN 2008, AUG. 25 - SEPT. 8

Andy Roddick participates in the Taste of the Open on the first Saturday of the tournament.



USTA BILLIE JEAN KING NATIONAL TENNIS CENTER AT FLUSHING MEADOWS-CORONA PARK, QUEENS, NEW YORK

LEVY RESTAURANTS

Attendance: 720,000

Menu: Right outside the main stadium, the Food Village, which is open to all ticket holders, sold everything from pizza and salad to Thai shrimp crepes. The Food Village also features a Ben & Jerry's ice cream shop, burgers, a deli, cheesesteak sandwiches, seafood and a kosher stand.

Fulton's Seafood Exchange offered a U.S. Open favorite: the cold Maine lobster roll, as well as the grilled salmon sandwich and sushi. New concession items included the summer berry salad with shrimp and the turkey Cobb salad. Embracing the local fare, Carnegie Deli had corned beef and pastrami sandwiches and Coney Island footlongs topped with sauerkraut and served with mustard and relish on the side.

Prices on food items ranged from \$4.50 for a hot dog to \$17 for the signature lobster roll.

Specialty Items: Suite holders were offered specialty items including king crab legs and other seafood items, BBQ ribs, fried chicken, European and American cheese platters from artisanal cheeses and dessert shots. A popular addition at this year's event was Tony Mantuano's Wine Bar food concept.

Commemorative Items: The signature drink of the U.S. Open is the Honey Deuce, a blend of Grey Goose Vodka, lemonade and Chambord, topped with honeydew melons in the shape of tiny tennis balls. The Honey Deuce was sold in a commemorative cup that had a complete list of all the U.S. Open men's and women's winners. Fans could get a Honey Deuce for \$13.

Staffing: The event called for 250 managers, 250 chefs that were flown in from various Levy Restaurants locations across the country and 1,500 hourly employees.

"We had teams of chefs and cooks who worked together at their home properties which enabled them to hit the ground running," said Chef Michael Lockard.

Final Thoughts: For two full weeks of food, drinks and tennis, Levy Restaurants spends the entire year planning and preparing. "Catering the U.S. Open is ultimately like hosting a Super Bowl for 14 straight-days," said Lockard. "Servicing 90 luxury suites twice a day, managing concessions, hospitality, player dining and five full-service restaurants, it's a monumental effort that requires efficiency, discipline and stamina."

The most popular food items were the Coney Island footlong, a charbroiled half-pound burger & cheeseburger, waffle fries and the Cold Maine lobster roll.

Lockard said things that worked well included the new wine bar food concept, the revamped Aces and Champions suites packages, and the new salads introduced along with the "grab-n-go" salad program.

"Aces and Mojitos, the club level restaurants, had significantly revamped menus this year which were a big hit," said Lockard. "As far as improvements for next year, I would like to focus on revamping the menus of the lower level restaurants." - Linda Domingo

Interviewed for this story: Michael Lockard, (312) 829-8326