

April Armbrust

From: venuestoday [venuestoday@mail.vresp.com]
Sent: Wednesday, February 11, 2009 7:45 PM
To: april@venuestoday.com
Subject: VT Pulse, Feb. 11, 2009



VT PULSE

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION FROM VENUES TODAY

February 11, 2009 • VOL. VIII, Number 5 • ISSN 1547-4143

Quote of the Week

"As I learned earlier this week, everyone is a (Department of Justice) specialist, but you can rest assured that we have a very extensive team that has thought this through and we will outline the facts to the regulators."

— Live Nation CEO Michael Rapino on concerns that his company's merger with Ticketmaster might spark an antitrust investigation.

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Greetings April,

Welcome to VT Pulse, your weekly guide to the "News Behind the Headlines." Venues Today staff is back from a busy travel schedule, and everywhere we went, the hot topic was the economy. Whether it was the INTIX conference in Salt Lake City or the Performing Arts Managers Conference in Atlanta, economic issues continued to be a persistent concern. Next week, keep your eyes out for our inaugural Venues Today reader's survey which arrives in inboxes on Monday.



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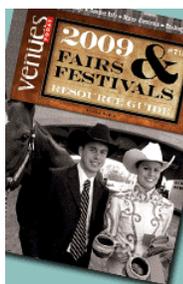
VT NEWS

TICKETS
MASSIVE MERGER SENDS MUSIC BIZ REELING

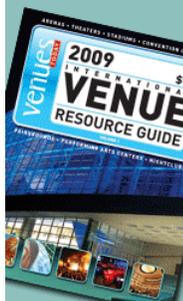
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SHORT
TAKES

>> GLOBAL SPECTRUM ADDS ABBOTSFORD — Global Spectrum has been hired to manage the new Abbotsford (British Columbia) Entertainment & Sports Centre. The venue is scheduled to open on May 9 with Third Day. Global Spectrum currently operates six Canadian facilities, including two British Columbia operations in Penticton and Dawson Creek. *Contact: Katherine Jeffcoatt, (604) 864-5586*

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ticketmaster

The ticket wars ended before the first volley was ever fired.

Live Nation and Ticketmaster ended their Battle of the Box Office with a Monday merger announcement that has already prompted a Justice Department review and outcry from politicians, ticketing competitors and Bruce Springsteen.

After months of trash talk, Ticketmaster and Live Nation have made nice and hope to combine into a single entity with nearly \$6 billion in annual revenue and about \$500 million in net earnings. If the deal is approved, the company will be renamed Live Nation Entertainment with Barry Diller serving as chairman, Irving Azoff as executive chairman and Live Nation Chief Executive Michael Rapino as chief executive and president.

Ticketmaster CEO Sean Moriarty's role in the proposed all-stock deal remains unclear.

"This [the merger talks] is the first time we got to sit across the table eyeball-to-eyeball and look at this as a merger of equals and not an acquisition target by them," Rapino told Live Nation employees and others during a conference call Tuesday. "Do we go it alone and continue our ticketing strategy and our digital strategy, or do we take an opportunity to merge with the number one ticketing company and portal in the business?"

The deal would give Live Nation access to a robust ticket platform after suffering an embarrassing crash with their own Live Nation platform going into its first major on sale with alt-rockers Phish, which Rapino characterized as "nothing that we didn't expect when you launch a platform as large and wide as ours." For its part Ticketmaster gets access to Live Nation's massive talent pool and entertainment content for venue clients.

Rapino said the deal only became possible after Ticketmaster agreed to allow Live Nation to create its own branded ticketing experience, adding that he would have renewed his previous contract if Ticketmaster would have given Live Nation more control of its ticketing portal.

"Now, there will be two systems," Rapino said. "There will be LiveNation.com which will handle our Live Nation content and concerts" and there will be "Ticketmaster which will serve many other interests beyond concerts."

"(Ticketmaster's) base technology is a real workhorse that you want to keep in place for a long time. What they haven't done successfully is build a lot of the features and flexibility to deliver a more Amazon.com type experience. We see great opportunity to take that Ticketmaster brand that's a little dusty and damaged, but has a great underpinning business," he said.

Rapino said he wanted the new system to use shopping cart technology where the user could grab band merchandise, parking passes and digital content during their ticket purchasing experience. He's even talked about replacing the much-maligned service fees with some type of advertising-revenue model.

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**The Crossing
Theatre, NSW,
Australia - Venue
Manager**

**Tulsa (OK) County
Fairgrounds (Expo
Square)
Chief Executive
Officer**

**UniverSoul Circus,
corporate office
near Atlanta, GA -
Various Positions**

**Live Nation,
Hollywood, Calif. -
Product Manager,
Online**

“This lets us have a balance sheet, free cash flow and profit to properly back-invest in technology and the consumer end of the business,” he said. “If we did not merge, I don’t think you’ll see Ticketmaster spend a lot of time reinventing their consumer experience.”

Rapino said the deal could be finalized as early as April, although Department of Justice Spokesperson Gina Talamona has already confirmed “the Antitrust Division is committed to vigorous enforcement of the merger antitrust laws and will conduct a thorough investigation of the proposed Ticketmaster/Live Nation transaction.”

Rapino downplayed the notion that this deal would get held up in Washington, remarking, “As I learned earlier this week, everyone is a (Department of Justice) specialist, but you can rest assured that we have a very extensive team that has thought this through and we will outline the facts to the regulators and prove to them that there is plenty of competition in ticketing and concert promotion. It’s a fact-based process, not opinion led, and we’ll let the DOJ do their job. When we bought House of Blues, we had similar press and opposition from the industry.”

Of course that was a different presidential administration, and many are wondering if President Barack Obama will take a tough stance against unpopular mergers. Singer Bruce Springsteen wrote on his website, “The one thing that would make the current ticket situation even worse for the fan than it is now would be Ticketmaster and Live Nation coming up with a single system, thereby returning us to a near monopoly.”

New York Democratic Senator Charles Schumer has come out strongly against the proposed merger, while New Jersey U.S. Representative Bill Pascrell has asked new U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder to oppose the deal and has vowed to hold congressional hearings on the matter.

The stock market’s reaction was also sour, with Live Nation dropping 17 percent to close at \$3.99 Wednesday, its biggest drop since December, while Ticketmaster dropped 18 percent to close at \$5.01. Standard & Poor’s equity report downgraded Live Nation on Tuesday to “buy” from “strong buy,” saying it anticipates a “tough regulatory review” that could mean negative performance on the stock for “the better part of 2009.” The firm added the upside of the merger didn’t seem “supremely convincing.”

“The deal has left many in the facility industry scratching their heads and wondering what it means,” said Michael Marion from the Alltel Arena in North Little Rock, Ark.

“To me the buildings are going along for the ride, and not in a position to change much. The artists always need buildings to play, and however you frame that puzzle, we’re still part of it.”

They hope to figure it out by renewal time if they are a Ticketmaster venue. Brad Mayne, Center Operating Co., Dallas, which manages the American Airlines Center, was planning a senior management meeting Thursday to discuss the new developments internally. “Number one, when you have Barry Diller, Irving Azoff and Michael Rapino on an executive committee for any company, it’s an incredible amount of star power,” Mayne said.

His concern as a venue manager is that Ticketmaster has always been an entity to help protect the facility in its deal with the promoter, controlling the ticket sales and cash flow. “That money doesn’t belong to anyone but the ticketholder until after the show. Ticketmaster has always been the treasurer to protect those interests and allow the facilities to manage what’s best for that

Live Nation,
Hollywood, Calif. -
 Software Product
 Manager, Ticketing -
 Core Applications

**University of South
 Carolina, Columbia**
 - Dean of the
 College of
 Hospitality, Retail
 and Sports
 Management

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community,” Mayne said.

On the other hand, Live Nation is his number one promoter, followed by AEG. “Now my number one promoter is my ticketing agent if this deal goes through,” Mayne said. “I don’t think there’s a concern event by event, but I think there is a concern when it comes to renewing our agreement.”

Opposition from the live entertainment community is expected, although most firms are keeping tightlipped about the deal. Michael Roth of AEG said his group wouldn’t comment, while Tickets.com was also keeping mum in the days following the deal. — Dave Brooks

Interviewed for this article: Michael Rapino, (310) 867-7127; Michael Marion, (501) 975-9030; Brad Mayne, (214) 665-4220



FAIRS & FESTIVALS MICHIGAN BUDGET WOES THREATEN FAIR SAFETY NET

Kiddie fun at the Michigan State Fair



Officials at the Michigan and Upper Peninsula State Fairs are scrambling to figure out their futures after Gov. Jennifer Granholm announced plans to ask the legislature to discontinue giving any funding to the events following this fiscal year.

The fairs receive funding from the state - via two separate departments - to help with budget shortages although not as part of their regular budgets.

“We were surprised,” said Lindsay Calcaterra, marketing director of the Michigan State Fair in Detroit. “I don’t think it was expected. As far as what we are going to do about it, I don’t think a full plan has been crystallized. We will be looking at various options to keep this 160-year tradition going.”

Facing a \$1.4 billion budget deficit, Granholm announced last week that when she makes her presentation to the legislature on executive budget recommendations Thursday (Feb. 12), she plans to cut off any funding to the Michigan State Fair, the Upper Peninsula State Fair in Escanaba and the Department of History, Arts and Libraries, the latter of which has a state budget of \$52.5 million.

“Michigan, like every state in the country, is facing a challenging budget situation as the result of what’s happening in the national economy,” said Leslee Fritz, spokesperson for the Office of the Michigan State Budget.

Observers believe the Upper Peninsula State Fair - which falls under the Michigan Department of

Agriculture - will suffer less of a blow than the Michigan State Fair.

"The Upper Peninsula State Fair is primarily self-sustaining," said Jennifer Holton, public information officer for the Michigan Department of Agriculture.

But budget shortfalls vary from year to year, said both Holton and Upper Peninsula general manager Scott Staelgraeve, and can be in the neighborhood of \$100,000. The fair also receives a premium grant of \$38,000 from the state, Staelgraeve said.

"Of our total budget, we generate 100 percent of our revenue, and if the revenue falls short of expenses, those expenses are transferred to the Department of Agriculture," Staelgraeve said.

Options for the Upper Peninsula State Fair, which generally has an attendance ranging from 80,000 to 100,000, include becoming a volunteer fair, perhaps directed by an area civic club.

The situation is more cloudy at the Michigan State Fair, which registered a budget shortage of \$350,000 for the 2008 fair.

"In 2007, we broke even; therefore the state did not fund us at all," Calcaterra noted. "The state doesn't fund the fair; it provides a safety net if there is a shortfall at the end of the year. When she is saying she is eliminating support, what she really means is that she is eliminating the state serving as a safety net if the fair should not break even."

However, the state does own the land that houses the Michigan State Fair and the governor has also announced her intention to "repurpose" that land. "If the fair continues in 2010, it will likely not happen on the Detroit site," Fritz said.

In 2008, attendance at the Michigan State Fair was about 225,000, a seven percent decline from 2007, which Calcaterra attributed to gas prices that exceeded \$4 a gallon and the economy.

Unlike the Upper Peninsula State Fair, the Michigan State Fair falls under the aegis of the Michigan Department of Management and Budget.

Neither fair official sees raising prices immediately for consumers as an option.

"We just raised the admission fee and went to a one-price model where the cost of the grandstand was rolled into the admission fee," Staelgraeve said, noting that adult admission went from \$6 to \$8 and youth went from free to \$5.

"It's a rural area and it's also an area where the prevailing wage is lower, so we're priced with what the regional economy can support."

At the Michigan State Fair, admission costs \$10 for adults and \$5 for ages 3 to 12 and for senior citizens.

The state's full-time legislature will have the opportunity to consider and debate Granholm's budget proposals and the bill will not be finalized until early July.

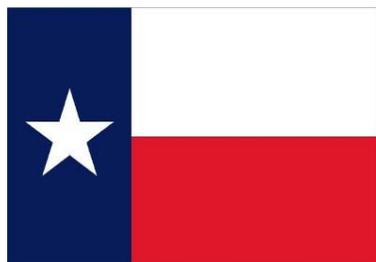
"It's always a negotiation," Fritz said. "I would venture to say the legislature has never adopted blindly what the governor wants. There will be a lengthy debate."

Both fair officials also emphasized that there will be events in 2009. Dates for the Michigan State Fair are Aug. 28 to Sept. 7; dates for the Upper Peninsula State Fair are Aug. 18 to 23. The fiscal year begins Oct. 1 and any decision the legislature makes will not take effect

until at least then.

As for 2010, "we're confident that we'll give it a shot," Calcaterra said. "Whether we're successful has yet to be seen. There will be efforts to keep this tradition going."
- Mary Wade Burnside.

Interviewed for this article: Lindsay Calcaterra, (313) 369-8250; Leslee Fritz, (517) 241-1217; Jennifer Holton and Barbara Hensinger, (517) 373-1052; Scott Staelgraeve, (906) 786-4011; Danny Huston, (765) 212-5784



Big Guns

The Lone Star state flexes its big guns in our annual look at Texas venues.

April is also the Spring Special - a look at the Fair & Festival Season. And we'll round out this issue with our second annual INTIX quarterly.

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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 Jan. 13, 2009.

TAMPA TAKES \$4 MIL WITH CELINE AND SIR ELTON

15,001 or More Seats	10,001-15,000 Seats	5,001-10,000 Seats	5,000 or Less Seats
1) Top Gear Live Gross Sales: \$5,394,012; Venue: AcerArena, Sydney, Australia; Attendance: 73,011; Ticket Range: \$169.17-\$60.46; Promoter: Brand Events Australia; Dates: Feb. 5-8; No. of Shows: 10	1) The Eagles Gross Sales: \$1,290,800; Venue: North Charleston (S.C.) Coliseum; Attendance: 9,187; Ticket Range: \$191-\$77; Promoter: AEG Live; Dates: Jan. 16; No. of Shows: 1 2) Leonard Cohen Gross Sales:	1) Cheech & Chong with Shelby Chong Gross Sales: \$346,580; Venue: Radio City Music Hall, New York; Attendance: 5,923; Ticket Range: \$75-\$35; Promoter: MSG Entertainment; Dates: Jan. 31; No. of Shows: 1 2) Alan Jackson	1) Jerry Seinfeld Gross Sales: \$698,355; Venue: The Colosseum at Caesars Palace, Las Vegas; Attendance: 6,592; Ticket Range: \$150-\$75; Promoter: AEG Live, In-House; Dates: Jan. 30-31; No. of Shows: 2

- 2) **The Eagles**
Gross Sales: \$2,238,788;
Venue: **St. Pete Times Forum, Tampa, Fla.**;
Attendance: 17,229; Ticket Range: \$187.75-\$47.75;
Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Jan. 29; No. of Shows: 1
- 3) **Celine Dion**
Gross Sales: \$1,942,354;
Venue: **St. Pete Times Forum, Tampa, Fla.**;
Attendance: 17,008; Ticket Range: \$152.75-\$32.25;
Promoter: AEG Live; Dates: Jan. 28; No. of Shows: 1
- 4) **The Eagles**
Gross Sales: \$1,660,132;
Venue: **Amway Arena, Orlando, Fla.**;
Attendance: 12,777; Ticket Range: \$185-\$45;
Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Jan. 31; No. of Shows: 1
- 5) **Rascal Flatts**
Gross Sales: \$459,379; Venue: **Wells Fargo Arena, Des Moines, Iowa**;
Attendance: 7,906; Ticket Range: \$66-\$50.75;
Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Jan. 18; No. of Shows: 1
- \$946,285; Venue: **Brisbane (Australia) Entertainment Centre**;
Attendance: 8,284; Ticket Range: \$130.62-\$92.89; Promoter: The Frontier Touring Company; Dates: Feb. 3; No. of Shows: 1
- 3) **Brad Paisley**
Gross Sales: \$370,644; Venue: **Ervin J Nutter Center, Dayton, Ohio**;
Attendance: 7,408; Ticket Range: \$51.75-\$41.75; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Jan. 29; No. of Shows: 1
- 4) **Rascal Flatts**
Gross Sales: \$354,489; Venue: **North Charleston (S.C.) Coliseum** ;
Attendance: 6,846; Ticket Range: \$62-\$20; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Jan. 24; No. of Shows: 1
- 5) **Jeff Dunham**
Gross Sales: \$322,744; Venue: **John Labatt Centre, London, Ontario**;
Attendance: 6,535; Ticket Range: \$50-\$13; Promoter: Icon Concerts; Dates: Feb. 4; No. of Shows: 1
- Gross Sales: \$308,655; Venue: **UCF Arena, Orlando, Fla.**;
Attendance: 5,553; Ticket Range: \$75-\$45; Promoter: In-House; Dates: Jan. 24; No. of Shows: 1
- 3) **Slipknot**
Gross Sales: \$271,780; Venue: **Paul E. Tsongas Arena, Lowell, Mass.**;
Attendance: 7,200; Ticket Range: \$42-\$39.75; Promoter: MassConcerts; Dates: Feb. 6; No. of Shows: 1
- 4) **Arctic Monkeys**
Gross Sales: \$245,548; Venue: **Hordern Pavillion, Sydney, Australia**;
Attendance: 5,251; Ticket Range: \$51-\$13; Promoter: Creative Festival Entertainment; Dates: Jan. 22; No. of Shows: 1
- 5) **B.B. King**
Gross Sales: \$209,764; Venue: **UCF Arena, Orlando, Fla.**;
Attendance: 2,989; Ticket Range: \$95-\$48; Promoter: In-House; Dates: Feb. 6; No. of Shows: 1
- 2) **Riverdance**
Gross Sales: \$693,984; Venue: **Tampa Bay (Fla.) Performing Arts Center**;
Attendance: 11,692; Ticket Range: \$72.50-\$20; Promoter: In-House; Dates: Jan. 20-25; No. of Shows: 8
- 3) **Stomp**
Gross Sales: \$620,596; Venue: **Fox Theatre, Atlanta**;
Attendance: 14,291; Ticket Range: \$58-\$20; Promoter: Theater of the Stars; Dates: Jan. 27-Feb. 1; No. of Shows: 8
- 4) **Riverdance**
Gross Sales: \$606,264; Venue: **Bob Carr Performing Arts Center, Orlando, Fla.**;
Attendance: 11,430; Ticket Range: \$57-\$29; Promoter: Broadway Across America; Dates: Jan. 13-18; No. of Shows: 8
- 5) **RAIN: The Beatles Experience**
Gross Sales: \$442,764; Venue: **Devos Place, Grand Rapids, Mich.**;
Attendance: 8,929; Ticket Range: \$65-\$15; Promoter: Broadway GR; Dates: Jan. 27-Feb. 1; No. of Shows: 8

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

THE BEAT

TRAVELOG INTIX, SALT LAKE CITY

Feb. 3-6, 2009

Tracy Noll from Penn State University in University Park (left) joins Jennifer Staats Moore from the Rialto Center for the Performing Arts in Atlanta in honoring Scott Zimmerman of SMG with the Outstanding Ticketing Professionals Award; Venues Today's Linda Deckard is seen here with 2009 Box Office Star Award Winner Josh Logan from the Houston Rockets and Toyota Center.



Utah Governor John Huntsman Jr. delivers the opening address during the INTIX welcome luncheon; on this year's tradeshow floor were David Chadwell from the Sommet Center in Nashville, Gene Connelly from the Cleveland Indians and Anthony Esposito from the Atlanta Braves. (VT Photos)



All it took was one small leak to flood this year's INTIX conference with rumors and speculation about the future of ticketing.

Just hours into the INTIX tradeshow, an article appeared on the Wall Street Journal's website reporting that Ticketmaster and Live Nation were in merger talks, sending the entire conference into a rumor-filled frenzy with few facts on the table.

Neither company would confirm the merger talks for another week, and Ticketmaster's own staff was mum on the details. Live Nation Ticketing did not exhibit.

"We just don't know anything about it," said the company's Jane Kleinberger, who said all staff at the Ticketmaster booth were just as surprised as the rest of the conference to learn the news. Even Cole Gahagan, Live Nation's sole representative at the trade show seemed surprised about the news and couldn't comment on the merger talks.

"Everyone is just really shocked to learn this news, especially in the middle of a ticketing conference," said Debbie Dixon from the Lincoln Center in Fort Collins, Colo. "There are always a lot of box office managers shopping for new ticketing systems at this conference and this just puts a cloud of uncertainty over everyone. I think people are hesitating to lock in any deal without first knowing how all the chips are going to fall."

Adding to that uncertainty were real concerns about the economy and how a dramatic drop in employment figures could affect box office sales. This year's conference attendance was down nearly 37 percent from last year's event in Chicago. 2009 attendance was 899, while exhibitors held even at 57 booths on the tradeshow floor.

"I've never seen as much uncertainty as I have seen this year," said Michael Gilotte of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees. "We represent many ticket takers on Broadway and people are very nervous about their jobs and the soft economy. Things are very difficult."

Utah's Republican Governor John Huntsman Jr. told the conference during a keynote address that he expected the economy would begin a rebound as early as the third quarter of 2009. Bobby Johnson, director of Engineering for Facebook, told the audience that new online communities like Facebook gave Box Office professionals low cost alternatives to advertise their tickets.

"Now is the time to build a presence around your Facebook page and target the audience that best matches your product," he said, later adding that "this was the tip of the iceberg" and that the platform was expected to be "evolving really

quickly.” Amazingly, five years ago, Facebook didn’t exist.

This year’s award winners included Karen Mosley from the Venetian Macao Resort Hotel in Taipei, who called in to accept her Spirit Award via telephone for the INTIX Spirit Award. This year’s Outstanding Box Office Award was presented to Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., while the Outstanding Ticketing Professional Award went to Scott Zimmerman from SMG. Roger Tomlinson, ACT Consultant Services, who has been in ticketing, which he calls the “human happiness industry,” for 40 years, was honored with the Patricia Spira Lifetime Achievement Award.

Venues Today also used the conference to launch its inaugural 2009 Box Office Stars Award. This year’s winners are Josh Logan from the Houston Rockets and Toyota Center, Sherry Caldwell from the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum and Russ Stanley from the San Francisco Giants. — Dave Brooks

Interviewed for this article: Jane Kleinberger, (949) 823-1600; Debbie Dixon, (970) 221-6808; Michael Gilotte, (202) 422-1782

FAIRS & FESTIVALS

INAUGURATION, ECONOMY IMPACT NATIONAL WESTERN



Herding cattle at the National Western Stock Show, Denver

Attendance dropped 4.5 percent at the National Western Stock Show in Denver, from last year’s 673,449 to 643,100.

But officials feared the economy would bring about something closer to a 10 percent decline and were pleased with

the Jan. 10-25 event that followed last year’s second-best attended show ever.

“Everybody that goes into these things realizes you can’t set a record every year,” said Marv Witt, vice president of operations for the event. “We were following up good numbers for us and going up against our second-best year. We knew that the economy was going to be tougher than normal than we’ve experienced in previous years.”

The weather for the time period varied from one day of snow to temperatures that reached into the 60s, a non-factor. However, the event was held during the Jan. 20 inauguration of President Barack Obama, who accepted his party’s nomination at Denver’s Invesco Field nearly five months prior to the stock show. Witt said that had more effect on attendance than any other inauguration he can remember.

“We were surprised,” he said. “This show goes through a presidential inauguration every four years, and this one just vacated the press from our facility. They were in tune with what was going on nationwide. I’ve never seen as much publicity and interest in an inauguration.”

Attendance was slow that day and picked up a little bit but still was down, Witt said.

Rodeo tickets for the entire run of the show were only off about \$88 per performance, which would average out to about five or six tickets per performance, Witt said. “We thought that was pretty good,” he said. “If it was not for the inauguration, we probably would have run pretty even with last year’s numbers as far as the rodeo tickets go.”

Food was down 4.71 percent, Witt noted, which was in line with the attendance drop.

The National Western Stock Show does not have concerts or a carnival but consists of a trade show and 44 events. Twenty-nine of those were rodeos, including 23 Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association events, three Professional Bull Riders Association events, two Mexican rodeos and one event that the stock show produces called the Martin Luther King Rodeo, which is held on Martin Luther King Day.

The Mexican Extravaganza features Portuguese, or bloodless, bull fights as well as cowboys from Mexico City and a mariachi band.

"It's quite a different format," Witt said. "It's a fiesta." Both performances of that event have sold out for the past few years but not this year, Witt said.

Tickets for rodeo performances ranged from \$12 to the Golden Buckle front-row seats that cost \$100, Witt said. Gate admission cost \$9 on weekends and \$7 on weekdays, the same as last year.

In an effort to counter the effects of the economy, the stock show offered more deals, especially in the first week of the event. However, this did not seem to attract fairgoers and attendance actually was down nine percent at first.

"As the show kept going, attendance came back," Witt said. The first weekend was the worst attended.

Next year's dates will be Jan. 9-24. - Mary Wade Burnside

Interviewed for this article: Marv Witt, (303) 297-1166

TRAVELOG

IAAM'S PERFORMING ARTS MANAGERS CONFERENCE, ATLANTA

Feb. 7-10, 2009

Michael Taormina, Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre; Bob Mayer, Tulsa; and John Smith, adjunct professor, University of Georgia, reunite; Jamie Vosmeier, director of group sales, Fox Theatre, Atlanta, is passionate about Super Groups.



Lorin Shepard, Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center, makes a point during the Town Hall; Chris Miller, McCaw Hall at Seattle Center, vice chair of the IAAM Performing Arts Committee, and Anne Marie Moraitakis, Atlanta Civic Center, welcome PAMC attendees to the King Tut exhibit.



The economy has performing arts center managers "saying thank you a lot" to donors, patrons and partners, said Michael Taormina, general manager of the Cobb Energy Center here before an audience of 221 attending the PAMC.

The economy was the main topic of the Town Hall gathering, an open forum that has grown quite popular with this group. Rodney Smith, who is in the process of moving to the Bexar County Performing Arts Center, San Antonio, Texas, facilitated the discussion. "It is about nurturing that ongoing relationship," Smith said. "The next 12-14 months are the real challenge."

But he cautioned against lowering prices in deference to the economy. "Develop a criteria. You can get this if you do this, but it's not a fire sale," he advised.

The manager of the Santa Monica (Calif.) Civic Aud has been asked by the city to undergo a budgeting exercise, cutting five percent. "I wouldn't take a budget-cutting exercise lightly," Smith said. "Maintain your mission." Most in the room said they have already cut budgets from five to 15 percent and found working with the staff to cut expenses combined with seeking new revenue sources is the basic drill. "Increasing productivity is the same as cutting labor costs," Smith added. It can be a struggle to get finance officers to see the relationship between revenue and expenses when they are focused on just one side of the equation.

Robyn Williams, Portland (Ore.) Center for the Performing Arts, said her organization has six months of operating revenues in reserves, which is an advantage now. "We built it up over several years without a lot of pain. We got

tired of the slash and burn approach.” Several responded, however, that their governments take the reserves, the flip side of covering the losses.

Others suggested going to donors to release funds that have been restricted to specific uses. The problem is, people are paralyzed. No one is certain what to expect.

The alternative is creating more revenue. Jeff Hartzog, Ruth Eckerd Hall, Clearwater, Fla., has begun selling small \$1 bags of popcorn at senior shows. Others have loosened rules prohibiting food and drink in the seating areas and have seen increased per caps and a generally respectful public. That led to a discussion of cupholders in performing arts halls. Some suggested they are a license to leave trash in the building and a noise hazard; others that they were a necessity and a convenience to increase revenues.

Jamie Vosmeier, director of group sales for the Fabulous Fox Theatre, Atlanta, spoke on increasing revenues through group sales. He advised managers it's not just about the traditional group built through the corporate rep or tour bus company anymore. Vosmeier's department sold 30,000 group tickets last year, each of which brought a \$3 service fee to the venue. And a lot of those groups were what he calls "Super Groups," people buying dinner and a show, being billed individually, but still seen as part of a group sale with partners. The "group" could be eight or 100. — Linda Deckard

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