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VT PULSE

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Quote of the Week

"This is act one in the play. We're going to be bullish and we believe that we can dominate in this space."

— Centerplate CEO Des Hague on the company's recent merger with Boston Culinary Group.

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Greetings,

Welcome to VT Pulse, your weekly guide to the "News Behind the Headlines." Voting begins tomorrow on the Venues Today Box Office Stars Awards. Check your inboxes for information on how you can honor the ticketing industry's brightest professionals.



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SHORT TAKES

>> AEG PUTS OUT \$20 MIL ON TITLE FIGHT —AEG has made a guaranteed \$20 million offer to host a fight between Manny Pacquiao and Floyd Mayweather Jr., the *LA Times* is reporting. The paper said the company's CFO Dan Beckerman said AEG would utilize the entire LA Live conference for the historic bout. Promoter Golden Boy Entertainment has yet to set a date for the fight.
Contact: Michael Roth, (213) 742-7155

>> LIVE NATION STRIKES RECYCLING DEAL —Waste Management and concert promoter Live Nation have signed a multi-year agreement making the waste hauler the official waste services and recycling sponsor of 66 Live Nation venues across the country. As part of the agreement, Houston-based Waste Management will assess Live Nation's current waste program, including the venues, concessions and backstage. *Contact: John Vlautin, (310) 867-7127*

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VT NEWS

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

CENTERPLATE/BCG MERGER LIFTS COMPANIES BEYOND 'SEA OF SAMENESS'

Greg Lesperance, Des Hague and Gary Wattie, all with Centerplate during IAAM's annual conference in Boston. Centerplate recently completed a merger with Boston Culinary Group.



Centerplate has merged with Boston Culinary Group, several officials from the company confirmed, creating a new concessions powerhouse with major league connections and a roster of college campuses under its wing.

Although neither side would reveal the terms of the deal, Centerplate CEO Des Hague described the agreement as a “merger among equals” with Hague remaining as CEO, while Centerplate CEO Joe O’Donnell becomes the company chairman and its largest shareholder. The name Centerplate will stay intact, while the Boston Culinary Group moniker will go away.

“They are truly one of the best in the business,” Hague said of BCG, noting that the company built a clientele of 100-plus clients under the leadership of O’Donnell. “It’s diverse; it’s got great relationships and great length of contract. Our two companies really complement one another. Where we’re big in pro sports, they’re big in colleges. Where we’re big in convention centers, they’re big in performing arts. Where we’re big in entertainment, they’re big in ski resorts. There’s very little overlap.”

The new entity has yet to do a joint deal, said Gary Wattie, VP of Corporate Sales at Centerplate. “Our last major contract before the announced merger was the Baltimore Convention Center.”

Under that agreement, Centerplate guarantees the city of Baltimore a minimum of \$1,650,000 annually over the next seven years. Centerplate will also invest \$2 million in capital improvements

The deal comes nearly a year after private equity firm Kohlberg Company acquired Centerplate for \$210 million and replaced former CEO Janet Steinmayer with Hague. During an April interview with Venues Today, Hague said he wanted to grow the company’s portfolio

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of collegiate clients. Boston Culinary Group handles 10 major conference schools including the 85,000-seat "Swamp" at the University of Florida in Gainesville, the 65,000-seat Lane Stadium at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg; the 63,000-seat Wagner Field at Kansas State in Manhattan; the 31,500-seat Groves Stadium at Wake Forest in Winston-Salem, N.C., and the 60,000-seat Vaught-Hemmingway Hollingsworth Field at the University of Mississippi in Oxford.

The deal was formerly agreed to in early December and will be finalized in the first quarter of next year.

"All the financing has been done. The thing we're waiting for now is the transfer of liquor licenses," Hague said. "We're hoping to consummate at the first quarter of 2010."

Hague said the merged entity will now control over 250 clients with 30,000 employees. He is expecting minimal layoffs.

"Every business needs a general manager, and many of the positions are stand-alone," Hague said. "The majority of our personnel are going to be in each location operating. The senior managers will continue to oversee the accounts they are responsible for, and since there's very little overlap, it's almost a dream merger. We don't have to do a five or 10 percent layoff to make the numbers work. There will be miniscule changes, other than changes to constantly improve our business that need to be made."

One week before announcing Nov. 20 that it is merging with Centerplate, Boston Culinary Group signed a 12-year food and beverage contract extension with Land Shark Stadium, Miami, a deal that goes deep for an NFL stadium these days. And they did it with new Miami Dolphins ownership.

Two weeks after announcing the merger agreement, BCG signed an agreement to negotiate a food and drink contract with Symphony Hall, Boston, and Tanglewood Music Center, Lenox, Mass., in a first-ever joint contract for the two venues. BCG's partner in the Boston performing arts centers will be Gourmet Caterers.

Steve Cahoon, vice president of marketing and business services for BCG, has had the task of keeping clients informed of developments and said there has been very little pushback from current customers. In the past few months, Centerplate has also added hospitality veterans George Wooten as executive vice president of operations, and Keith B.W. King as senior vice president, general counsel; and has promoted Hadi K. Monavar to executive vice president of strategic planning.

Macquarie Capital (USA) Inc. is acting as financial advisor to Centerplate and Ropes & Gray LLP is acting as its legal advisor. Goulston & Storrs is acting as Boston Culinary Group's legal advisor.

Boston Culinary Group's Cambridge, Mass., offices will close under the deal. Centerplate corporate offices will remain in Stamford, Conn., and Spartanburg, S.C.

Hague said that more acquisitions are expected ahead to help get the industry out of its "sea of sameness."

"There are other opportunities to grow through mergers, strategic acquisitions and alliances," Hague said. "We're very well financed.

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NSW, Australia - Floor Manager

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We've got one of the best debt-to-profit ratios in the business and that gives us an opportunity to grow through acquisitions. This is act one in the play. We're going to be bullish and we believe that we can dominate in this space." – Dave Brooks and Linda Deckard

Interviewed for this story: Des Hague, (203) 975-5900; Steve Cahoon, (617) 499-2700 x168; Gary Wattie, (610) 558-3753



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FAIRS & FESTIVAL

WARPED PRODUCER ANNOUNCES NEW THROWDOWN TOUR

A seating map for the upcoming Country Throwdown tour. Producer Kevin Lyman said the tour take advantage of its Ticket Takeover system, which gives the best seats to presale buyers.



LAS VEGAS – After finding much success with punk music and heavy metal, tour promoter Kevin Lyman is trying his hand at another genre: country music.

Lyman announced a new tour during the promoters panel at the first annual International Music Festival Conference at the Planet Hollywood Hotel and Casino, Dec. 6-8 in Las Vegas.

“We’re looking at ourselves as one of the last artist development companies and that’s our focus for all our tours,” said Lyman, whose company 4fini productions produces the Vans Warped Tour and the Rockstar Taste of Chaos and Rockstar Mayhem tours.

The country run will be titled the Country Throwdown, and will feature Montgomery Gentry, Jamey Johnson, Little Big Town and Jack Ingram and hit amphitheaters with a cavalcade of lifestyle attractions and vendors from May 13 to June 20. Lyman said he will partner with Live Nation’s president of Country Music Touring Brian O’Connell on the tour. Lyman said his company opened an office in Nashville to help book and promote the tour, staffed by Sarah Baer and Kate Truscott, along with former Clear Channel Online Music manager Allison Skiff.

“We learned how to integrate a lot of brands into our festivals to help support us and we plan to keep our ticket prices very low for this tour,” Lyman said.

4fini’s Marketing Manager Paul Kersh said the tour will feature a unique ticketing concept called Ticket Takeover. The offer will be available for a limited time through pre-sale, which begins in February. Using a new seating map, the promotion gives all pre-sale buyers the chance to get prime seats for the same price. The team hadn’t quite worked out all the logistics for the promotion, but explained that the goal was to get some of the best seats into the hands of early buyers.

“The whole idea was to create a fair system for the fans to get up close and personal with their favorite bands,” he said. “This is something that Kevin (Lyman) created to reward the fans.”

Regular on-sale tickets will be priced into two separate tiers, and reduced lawn prices will also be available.

The show will feature 12 main artists performing on three stages – one main stage and two smaller stages. Lyman said his team also plans to launch the Bluebird Café Tent with nine local singer-songwriters playing intimate, in-the-round type sets, and then brought back onto the main stage at night to perform during set changes.

“I think it’s going to be interesting to see how new events do in this atmosphere,” said fellow panelist Rick Farman from Superfly Entertainment, which helps to promote the annual Bonnaroo Festival in Manchester, Tenn. “Things that are launching now can build a niche within the space.”

Other artists on the Throwdown tour include Eric Church, the Eli Young Band, Jonathan Singleton & The Grove, Lost Trailers, Ryan Bingham and Emily West, with more artists to be announced.

Lyman said he’s launching the tour as sponsorships are generally down for most festivals, but business has been relatively stable for his various properties.

“At the Warped Tour we were even. The metal tours going into their second year were up, but I really think the challenges are coming up now,” Lyman said. “Going a year and a half into this economic downturn, brands seem to be holding onto their money and can’t make an economic decision. Everything has seemed to really slow down in the

past three or four months. It just seems like people are sitting in a bowl of mud right now, and no one wants to really step up. “

Lyman said he did notice that more brands are starting to deal directly with the successful festival organizers.

“We’re starting to find ourselves more in the role of an agency and trying to come up with creative ways to help them spend the money,” Lyman said. “So if you’re out there at any level of festival, you’ve got to help the brands figure out how to spend their money, almost more than why they should spend money. You need to be more creative. If you’re just going in there with your silver, gold and platinum package, you’ll find there are already so many people coming at them with that,” he said.

Lyman added that he expects much more last minute decision-making this year on the part of companies and that sponsorship spending will be committed much later toward the festival dates. — Dave Brooks

Interviewed for this story: Kevin Lyman and Paul Kirsh, (626) 799-7188; Rick Farman, (212) 375-9652



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CONVENTION CENTERS

CONSTRUCTION SET TO BEGIN ON NEW ACAPULCO CONVENTION CENTER

The Acapulco International Convention Center closed temporarily last week while plans for a new center were finalized. The existing building, which is now open, will be replaced with a brand new \$50 million state-of-the-art facility. The old building will be converted into shopping outlets, restaurants and theaters.

The project is funded by a private Mexican investment corporation that is leasing the property and grounds from state government. Construction on the new building could begin as early as January and should take approximately 24 months to complete.

Marketing executives assured that convention business will not be interrupted as the existing facility will remain open for all scheduled events, including the annual Tianguis Turistico tradeshow scheduled for April 25-28. Tianguis Turistico, a tradeshow sponsored by the Mexico Tourism Board and the Mexican Ministry for Tourism, provides an opportunity for national and international buyers to meet with more than 500 supplier companies of the Mexican tourism industry – selling and promoting Mexico as a destination.

“The current facility is 36-years-old,” said David Martinez, Groups and Meetings manager for Acapulco Destination Marketing Office. He said the main reason they are constructing an entirely new facility is the cost of maintaining the existing convention center is very high due to its age, and they also need a newer, state-of-the-art facility to meet the changing needs of the meeting and convention industry. “(The old building) wasn’t competitive to other convention centers in Mexico and the U.S.”

Acapulco itself is undergoing a lot of changes, particularly in the convention tourism industry. The Fairmont Acapulco Princess recently introduced a new \$3 million exhibit hall featuring 20,000 sq. ft. of exhibition space and a capacity of 4,300 people. The Grand Hotel Acapulco & Convention Center is also undergoing an extensive remodeling project that includes 14 meeting rooms and a ballroom that can accommodate up to 900 guests.

A third convention center is planned for Acapulco, the Expo Center at Mundo Imperial, located in the exclusive “Diamond Zone” of Acapulco. This project is currently on hold and should resume construction in 2010 for a scheduled completion of 2011. The Mundo Imperial development consists of a 4,000-seat theatre and will eventually include a resort, destination spa, and promenade with shops and restaurants.

Martinez said the new Acapulco International Convention Center, among all the other options currently available and planned for the near future in Acapulco, will give them a leg up in competing with other international and national convention destinations.

“We’re expecting big events and big meetings,” he said, adding that the new concept will also be attractive to leisure travelers as it is located in Acapulco’s “Golden Zone” which is the main tourism area in the destination and will be accessible to old center, which will be converted into shopping outlets, restaurants, and movie theatres.

Marketing for the new convention center will begin in March or April 2010. – Lindsay Sandham

Interviewed for this article: David Martinez, (845) 358-3920

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 Nov. 17.

RUMORS? NO, FLEETWOOD MAC REALLY DID ROCK SYDNEY'S ACER

15,001 or More Seats	10,001-15,000 Seats	5,001-10,000 Seats	5,000 or Less Seats
<p>1) Fleetwood Mac Gross Sales: \$2,833,407; Venue: AcerArena, Sydney; Attendance: 19,400; Ticket Range: \$179.25-\$115.88; Promoter: Andrew McManus Presents; Dates: Dec. 7-8; No. of Shows: 2</p> <p>2) Wisin & Yandel "La Revolucion" Gross Sales: \$2,778,573; Venue: Coliseo De Puerto Rico, San Juan; Attendance: 50,033; Ticket Range: \$200-\$20; Promoter: No Limit Entertainment Corp.; Dates: Dec. 4-7; No. of Shows: 4</p> <p>3) Phish Gross Sales: \$1,819,250; Venue: Wachovia Complex, Philadelphia; Attendance: 36,436; Ticket Range: \$50; Promoter: In-house, Live Nation; Dates: Nov. 24-25; No. of Shows: 2</p> <p>4) Danny Green vs. Roy Jones Jr. - World Title Boxing Gross Sales: \$1,610,357; Venue: AcerArena, Sydney; Attendance: 12,198; Ticket Range: \$915.35-\$50.34; Promoter: Green Machine Boxing, Square Ring Promotions; Dates: Dec. 2; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p>5) Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band Gross Sales: \$1,489,441; Venue: HSBC Arena, Buffalo, N.Y.; Attendance: 19,000; Ticket Range: \$95-\$29; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Nov. 22; No. of Shows: 1</p>	<p>1) Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band Gross Sales: \$1,295,766; Venue: 1st Mariner Arena, Baltimore; Attendance: 14,829; Ticket Range: \$98-\$29; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Nov. 20; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p>2) Trans Siberian Orchestra Gross Sales: \$907,699; Venue: Giant Center, Hershey, Pa.; Attendance: 18,414; Ticket Range: \$59.50-\$25; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Nov. 22; No. of Shows: 2</p> <p>3) Trans-Siberian Orchestra Gross Sales: \$641,193; Venue: Dunkin Donuts Center, Providence, R.I.; Attendance: 12,523; Ticket Range: \$62.50-\$27; Promoter: In-house, Live Nation; Dates: Nov. 18; No. of Shows: 2</p> <p>4) Phish Gross Sales: \$523,850; Venue: Cobo Arena, Detroit; Attendance: 10,519; Ticket Range: \$50; Promoter: In-house, Live Nation; Dates: Nov. 18; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p>5) KISS Gross Sales: \$440,258; Venue: San Diego Sports Arena; Attendance: 8,126; Ticket Range: \$130-\$19.50; Promoter: AEG Live; Dates: Nov. 27; No. of Shows: 1</p>	<p>1) Robin Williams Gross Sales: \$539,205; Venue: Mohegan Sun Arena, Uncasville, Conn.; Attendance: 6,805; Ticket Range: \$135-\$85; Promoter: In-house, Live Nation; Dates: Nov. 18; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p>2) Aventura Gross Sales: \$452,678; Venue: Agganis Arena, Boston; Attendance: 5,538; Ticket Range: \$98-\$58; Promoter: Cardenas Marketing Network; Dates: Nov. 28; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p>3) Trans-Siberian Orchestra Gross Sales: \$406,998; Venue: Wachovia Arena, Wilkes-Barre, Pa.; Attendance: 8,134; Ticket Range: \$59.50-\$25; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Nov. 20; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p>4) Dream Theater Gross Sales: \$275,811; Venue: Hordern Pavillion, Sydney; Attendance: 2,863; Ticket Range: \$117.32-\$54; Promoter: Michael Coppel Presents; Dates: Dec. 5; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p>5) Broad Street Brawl: Hopkins vs. Ornelas Gross Sales: \$231,390; Venue: The Liacouras Center, Philadelphia; Attendance: 3,183; Ticket Range: \$200-\$25; Promoter: Golden Boy Promotions; Dates: Dec. 3; No. of Shows: 1</p>	<p>1) Radio City Rockettes Gross Sales: \$6,064,551; Venue: Fox Theatre, Atlanta; Attendance: 105,080; Ticket Range: \$65.50-\$25.50; Promoter: In-house, MSG Entertainment; Dates: Nov. 19-Dec. 6; No. of Shows: 35</p> <p>2) Bob Dylan Gross Sales: \$908,242; Venue: United Palace Theatre, New York; Attendance: 9,621; Ticket Range: \$129-\$59; Promoter: In-house, Live Nation; Dates: Nov. 17-19; No. of Shows: 3</p> <p>3) Pixies Gross Sales: \$638,465; Venue: Hammerstein Ballroom, New York; Attendance: 13,194; Ticket Range: \$73-\$38; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: Nov. 23-26; No. of Shows: 4</p> <p>4) The Color Purple Gross Sales: \$586,227; Venue: Ruth Eckerd Hall, Clearwater, Fla.; Attendance: 10,421; Ticket Range: \$374-\$67; Promoter: In-house; Dates: Nov. 24-29; No. of Shows: 8</p> <p>5) Cirque Dreams: Illumination Gross Sales: \$537,425; Venue: Civic Center of Greater Des Moines (Iowa); Attendance: 13,772; Ticket Range: \$52.50-\$15; Promoter: In-house; Dates: Dec. 1-6; No. of Shows: 8</p>

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

THE BEAT

DEALS

LAKELAND CENTER SIGNS WITH OVATIONS

The Lakeland (Fla.) Center



Concessionaire: Oventions Food Services

Facility: Lakeland (Fla.) Center

Date: Nov. 1, 2009

Terms: A five-year deal with options, the contract calls for Oventions to pay 30-40 percent of gross concessions sales, depending upon the total, and 15-22.5 percent of catering. Oventions will also pay a sliding percentage of alcoholic beverage sales, from 35-45 percent. In addition, Oventions will invest \$300,000 in equipment.

This is the first change in concessionaires for the 30-year-old Lakeland Center, which opened its doors with Aramark in the kitchen. Mike LaPan, venue executive director, said four companies showed interest, with Texas Cattle Co. and Levy Restaurants submitting bids and Aramark making an offer.

Oventions was selected for its aggressive plans and strong reputation, he said. The firm plans to implement its Everything's Fresh™ concessions program as well as develop an outreach to incorporate local culinary culture for relevant key events, he said. Most of the investment in equipment will be to add fresh-to-customer product. They are also upgrading the concessions offers, incorporating a one-third pound burger and a 4/1 hot dog.

The Lakeland Center, which includes an arena, a theater and a conference center, averages \$2 million annually in food and beverage sales, based on sales the past four years, LaPan said. Historically, catering took the larger piece of the pie, but this past year, concessions have been stronger. "If 2010 is in line with last

year, it will mean more concessions, less catering. We have an advantage in that we are three venues in one. If we were just a conference center, we would be in trouble.”

Mark Pruett has been named general manager for Ovations in Lakeland, replacing Paul Sparks, who had been there for Aramark for the past two years. Chef David Moros is staying as is most of the Aramark staff, LaPan said.

It helps that Ovations is headquartered in Lutz, Fla., about 30 miles away. LaPan expects to have great communication with the company.

Business in general is good, he added. Sales are up five percent for the Broadway series, which kicked off with Camelot and Jingle Bell Rock last week. – Linda Deckard

Interviewed for this story: Mike LaPan, (863) 834-8133

TRAVELOG

KEEPING UP WITH CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS IS THE KEY TO SERVICE



Mike Wooley, Populous

LAS VEGAS – Learning from others in related industries and walking the walk the customer walks are two simple ways to improve customer service, said Mike Wooley, Populous. He spoke here on the topic of “Looking at your fairs through the attendees’ eyes” during the International Association of Fairs & Expositions conference Nov. 30-Dec. 3.

For instance, he noted, flat screen TVs are in most people’s homes today, which means that is the expectation of what the experience should be at entertainment venues. It’s important that fair managers know who the customer is and how they match up. He believes fairs are most like movies and amusement parks in gender of customer, more like movies and NASCAR in education.

Whoever they are, “expectations are much greater today,” Wooley said. “I’m a big proponent of managing by walking around. Engage your customers and your staff.”

He compared fairs to professional sports and asked those in attendance about their training programs. Most had volunteer staffs, but they still need training.

Signage is key to a good customer experience, and Wooley suggested looking at airport signage for the best ideas. “What airports do is get people where they need to go.” He suggested that all signs need to be at eye level. “As architects and building managers, we put the signs too high,” he said.

“Use ambassadors outside your facility in the parking lot,” Wooley suggested. Those are people on bikes or golf carts who greet people outside the gates with useful information on where to go, whether they are arriving or leaving.

Customers need to see organization to feel safe, Wooley said. Uniforms are one tool of the trade that gives them that comfort level. Cleanliness is another.

There are also best practices to keep in mind, particularly for security like bag searches, he continued. “Search no less than nine feet from in front of the ticket taker,” he said. And Wooley advises use of an 18-inch wide table for placing the bags on to be searched. The skinnier tables can make a big difference in ingress. “It cuts down on the barriers,” he said. And have a trash can at security.

Nametags are always an issue at any entertainment venue. “A lot of companies like to use lanyards, which double as ID and for clocking in,” Wooley observed. However, lanyards are not a good way for the customer to identify the employees. He prefers a lapel pin on the left of the shirt or jacket so that the customer can engage the employee by name.

Uniforms should clearly identify the difference between security staff and cleaning staff, Wooley said.

He is most impressed by the food and drink signage at fairs. “Minor league baseball and college facilities could learn from your ability to brand concessions,” he said. “I always know what food I can get at fairs.”

Finally, a manager must pay attention to his employees, Wooley told attendees. “Walk the path your customers walk, see what they are seeing,” which ties back to expectations. Most people are recycling at home, he noted. They will expect a recycling option at the fair. “Keep up with the customer’s expectations.”
– Linda Deckard

Interviewed for this story: Mike Wooley, (615) 345-9137

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