



(Clockwise from top left) Mercedes-Benz Superdome, New Orleans; Eric Church at BancorpSouth Arena, Tupelo, Miss.; Smoothie King Arena, New Orleans; Rock & Worship Road Show at Landers Center, Southaven, Miss..

LOCATION BENEFITS SOUTHERN VENUES

Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama venues consider it one big neighborhood

by R.V. BAUGUS

Venues in the Deep South considered as top spots for touring shows and events can be excused for having just a little extra pride in the designation. In a region already known for Southern hospitality, these are the places that add an extra scoop of down-home friendliness for the maximum enjoyment of both artists and fans. “We pride ourselves in offering excellent customer service and friendly event staff that has been recognized by the NFL and NBA,” said Sabrina Trahan, event marketing and media coordinator for the New Orleans top spot venues in **MERCEDES-BENZ SUPERDOME, SMOOTHIE KING CENTER** and **CHAMPIONS SQUARE**. >

“Our easy-to-work-with and knowledgeable staff contributes greatly to tours coming back to our venues in New Orleans.”

“New Orleans has a diverse makeup, which lends itself to doing different types of shows,” Trahan said. “There’s an audience here for classic rock, urban shows, as well as a developing younger audience. Additionally, our facilities are state-of-the-industry and provide the technical offerings and other amenities that shows require today.”

To the east, Mississippi and Alabama also have venues that parlay old-fashioned hospitality into positive net results and audiences who keep coming back.

“In a market as small as ours, our staff understands that we can’t afford for any of our guests to have a bad experience at one of our events,” said Todd Hunt, executive director of **BANCORPSOUTH ARENA AND CONFERENCE CENTER** in Tupelo, Miss. “Maintaining a positive attitude and answering questions with an ‘I’ll see what I can do’ response goes a long way in maintaining positive guest relations.”

And sometimes, it even means just doing something as simple as replenishing spilled concessions.

“I have empowered my associates to take care of our guests from getting them popcorn that they spilled to helping them find great seats for the next concert,” said Allen Sanders, general manager of the 1,800-seat **MONTGOMERY (Ala.) PERFORMING ARTS CENTER**. “I believe it is our job as venue managers to create an atmosphere where the customer can forget what’s going on outside our venue for the next three hours or so.”

While managers like Sanders and others want their guests to escape the pressures of the world for a period of time in their venues, don’t think that the facility team will ever forget what is required to ensure that patrons have the kind of experience that leaves them wanting to come back.

Some, like **ALARIO CENTER** in Westwego, La., a short drive from New Orleans, even carry an extra special civic

responsibility. “We do play a unique role in the event of a declared disaster, serving as a pre-disaster public evacuation site, base camp for first responders, and a post-disaster relief and recovery site” said Lydia Folse, the venue’s general manager.

LOCATION IS IDEAL

Deep South venues are situated within very manageable proximity to each other, a definite asset when it comes to tours and shows that route through the region. Todd Mastry, executive director of **LANDERS CENTER** in Southaven, Miss., just six miles from Memphis, acknowledges that the venue’s location contributes to its success.

“The huge demographic cross-section of the Mid-South is the biggest reason why the location is good for shows,” he said. “Geographically, we are in the middle of Nashville, Atlanta, New Orleans, St. Louis, Dallas, Little Rock and Tulsa, so it makes it very easy for nationally-touring shows to route through on the way from one city to another.”

Many of the venues in Louisiana also reap the benefits provided by their location. Situated less than two hours from New Orleans, Lafayette and Baton Rouge, **HOUMATERREBONNE CIVIC CENTER** gives planners and attendees big-city amenities with small-town hospitality, said venue Director Janel Ricca. The venue is especially friendly for outdoor events.

“We have a paved parking lot with a vehicle capacity of 1,600 that is equipped with RV pedestals that can accommodate 200 RVs,” Ricca said. “With electricity and water hookups throughout the parking lot, this space is ideal for outdoor events and rallies.”

Across the state, **LAKE CHARLES CIVIC CENTER** Manager Jimmy Pottorff noted that his complex is located less than a mile off of

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TOPSTOPS

DEEP SOUTH | 2016

Based on concert and event grosses from 3/1/15 - 2/29/16, and as reported to *Venues Today*.

VENUE, LOCATION	NO. OF SEATS	TOTAL GROSS	ATTENDANCE	SHOWS
1. Smoothie King Center, New Orleans	18,000	\$5,627,405	120,598	18
2. UNO Lakefront Arena, New Orleans	10,000	\$4,130,453	144,270	47
3. Landers Center, Southaven, Miss.	10,000	\$2,949,287	64,925	20
4. Champions Square, New Orleans	8,000	\$2,600,859	69,665	15
5. CenturyLink Center, Bossier City, La.	14,000	\$2,456,288	75,627	25
6. BancorpSouth Arena, Tupelo, Miss.	10,000	\$1,839,909	92,906	26
7. BJCC Arena, Birmingham, Ala.	19,000	\$705,965	15,938	2
8. Cajundome, Lafayette, La.	13,800	\$668,805	8,401	4
9. BankPlus Amphitheater, Southaven, Miss.	11,000	\$604,189	9,835	1
10. The Amph. at the Wharf, Orange Beach, Ala.	10,000	\$600,751	10,021	1

Compiled by Monique Potter, HotTickets@venuestoday.com

TOPSTADIUM

DEEP SOUTH | 2016

Based on concert and event grosses from 3/1/15 - 2/29/16, and as reported to *Venues Today*.

VENUE, LOCATION	NO. OF SEATS	TOTAL GROSS	ATTENDANCE	SHOWS
Mercedes-Benz Superdome, New Orleans	73,000	\$7,715,158	119,697	4

Compiled by Monique Potter, HotTickets@venuestoday.com

Interstate 10 halfway between Houston and Baton Rouge.

“Southwest Louisiana is experiencing an economic renaissance with over \$90 billion of expansion planned in the liquefied natural gas, chemical and petrochemical industries,” Pottorff said. “The impact of these industries will be adding an estimated 30,000 jobs and, with the booming casino business, manufacturing and shipping, the population will be looking for a variety of entertainment.”

Basically, any show in Louisiana is fair game for people to come to from anywhere else in the state.

“Our geographic region is about a 100-mile circumference,” said Greg Davis, the veteran director of top stop **CAJUNDOME** on the campus of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. “It goes west to Baton Rouge, east to Lake Charles, north to Alexandria and south to Houma. When we are the only date in Louisiana, the market is the entire state, especially when you consider that Lafayette is the point where I-49 and I-10 meet. Travel to and from Lafayette is a breeze.”

Baton Rouge, of course, is the home to Louisiana State University, part of the football-rabid Southeastern Conference of which Mississippi and Alabama also play to great success in front of hundreds of thousands of fans on game days.

“Being from Seattle, I was immediately impressed by the people of Louisiana,” said Michael Day, SMG’s general manager of the **BATON ROUGE RIVER CENTER**. “They are proud of their football, their food, and their fun. The people of this region get out and play. Every weekend, especially in the spring and fall, there are food and music festivals all over town. It’s a growing market, and the mayor’s office has done an incredible job building up and developing downtown over the past 10 years. It’s just a fun place to be.”

Speaking of fun places to be, University of New Orleans’ **LAKEFRONT ARENA** General Manager Marco Perez has been at the facility since it opened in 1983. Not too many venues can say that many of their team members and management staff have been with them for 20 to 25 years. Perez and his team takes pride in creating not just experiences but memorable ones.

“Generations of New Orleanians have been coming to our venue and sharing their

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 stories with us,” Perez said of his top spot venue. “They remember banging their heads in the 80’s to rock bands and now bringing their kids to great family shows we host like Disney on Ice or Sesame Street Live. We take pride in the fact that our guests enjoy returning to our venue and it truly speaks volumes about our level of customer service. We believe in investing in our staff that in turn provides excellent customer service to our patrons.”

ENSURING SUCCESS

It is tempting to overanalyze what exactly guarantees future success, but Perez believes the solution is quite simple: “For us, it is listening to our patrons, from creating a new VIP lounge (Spotlights) to upgrading food services.”

That said, there are some new business trends that are taking root and that the engaged venue manager will respond to.

The example Perez cited is shared by Kathy Lowrey, general manager of **NORTHSHORE HARBOR CENTER** in Slidell, La. “Although not a new trend, we continue to see a demand for healthy food

choices in both catering and concessions,” she said. “We are also seeing clients contract their event dates substantially farther out than in recent years.”

Another top spot venue in Louisiana, **CENTURYLINK CENTER** in Bossier City, believes that guest safety has to be at the top of the list of business trends.

“Safety has always been a primary concern, but due to recent world issues we are even more proactive,” said Rebecca Bonnevier, general manager. “CenturyLink Center implemented the use of walk-through metal detectors prior to guest entry. At first people were unsure of the process, but now are getting the hang of it and seem to appreciate the extra security measure.”

Hunt also places a priority on safety. “Safety and security continue to be at the forefront,” he said. “Balancing the increased demands for the safety of our guests with the costs required to provide said security is a daily challenge.”

Then, of course, there is the dynamic world of ticketing, one which seems to evolve daily.

“The way that we reach our customers and accommodate how people are buying tick-

ets today has changed with the evolution of social media and digital marketing,” said Trahan. “Also, the expectations of audiences have changed. Ticket prices are generally higher, and people expect superior customer service, clean venues and easily accessible information.”

Everything seems to keep coming back to customer service, as it should, said Davis.

“It starts with the hiring decision,” he said. “Here in Lafayette, there is a natural propensity for common courtesy. It has not been difficult to find employees who are customer-driven simply because they believe it is the right thing to do. Human decency and mutual respect, when practiced as a corporate value system, is highly contagious. People love it, including customers, employees and management.”

Interviewed for this story: **Rebecca Bonnevier**, (318) 747-2501; **Greg Davis**, (337) 265-2100; **Michael Day**, (225) 389-7110; **Lydia Folse**, (504) 349-5525; **Todd Hunt**, (662) 841-6573; **Kathy Lowrey**, (985) 781-3650; **Todd Mastry**, (662) 470-2102; **Marco Perez**, (504) 280-7171; **Marshall Perry**, (334) 615-3171; **Jim Pottorff**, (337) 491-1256; **Janet Ricca**, (985) 850-4657; **Allen Sanders**, (334) 481-5110; **Sabrina Trahan**, (504) 587-3924

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