





THE LONG, HOT SUMMER

by LINDA DECKARD

AEG and Staples Center, Los Angeles, were on the front page of newspapers worldwide this summer, not once, not twice but thrice. The third time around the public truly began to recognize AEG as an entertainment corporation, like they might know Disney, as that company organized and produced an arena-hosted memorial for Michael Jackson, the King of Pop, on July 7.

"Nobody knew what to expect because there was nothing to compare it to," said Lee Zeidman, senior VP and general manager of Staples Center, Los Angeles, and L.A. Live and recipient of the Venues Today 2009 Hall of Headlines award for News.

The summer's unique event slate included:

- Moving two World Wrestling Entertainment's Raw performances from the Pepsi Center in Denver to the Staples Center a week before curtains.
- Hosting two games of the NBA championship, followed by the Los Angeles Lakers' NBA championship parade down a new downtown route, beginning at L.A. Live and ending at the 90,000-capacity Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.
- Winding down with rehearsals for Jackson's This Is It! shows, which morphed quickly into preparing the arena for his memorial service.

The summer's events, beginning with the Memorial Day weekend WWE booking to the Jackson memorial which then shifted immediately into the scheduled run of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, drew nearly 500,000 people to the streets and seats of L.A. Live. It was unprecedented.

The first step this long summer was convincing WWE to move its Pepsi Center date in Denver to Staples Center. Pepsi Center had a conflict; the NBA Western Conference Finals were set for the same night. Since the Denver Nuggets were playing the Los Angeles Lakers, Zeidman had an open date, but it wasn't just 'come on over.' He had to negotiate a deal and convince WWE that it would be successful and they would lose nothing.

Both organizations made money off the deal, and more than



that, Zeidman believes it built a relationship that just might, he hopes, lead to Staples Center being the permanent home of WWE's Summer Slam.

Then, the Staples Center staff watched the Western Conference Finals with hopes of hosting the NBA Finals again. "During that time period, we're working with the city and Lakers to plan the parade and after-party," Zeidman said.

This championship parade was different because L.A. Live was now in the mix. Formerly, they had used that real estate, a parking lot, so people could watch the big reveal that was going on inside Staples Center on the big screen. This time, they kicked off the parade at L.A. Live with 5,000 cheering them on, paraded down Figueroa Street before an estimated 250,000 in 2.2 miles and ended at the Los Angeles Coliseum.

After the parade, the plan was to host Jackson's full rehearsal dates before his 50-show stand at the O2 in London. He was to leave for London on July 5.

The load in was on June 22. He started rehearsals Tuesday, June 23 and 24 and "we know what happened on the 25th."

Zeidman went from the euphoria of hoping Jackson would bring "This Is It!" to the Staples Center after his London run went off without a hitch to the immediate issue of securing all the Jackson production set and tapes and the eventual challenge of producing the memorial service.

Zeidman smiles these days when people ask, 'What are you doing now that the Lakers, Clippers and Kings aren't playing?'

"I think back to times in my career, what it's like when your teams are done and you're going to do some events throughout the summer and you are going to get the building ready. We don't have time to do that anymore. We just completed this \$20 million renovation at the same time we were doing all these events," Zeidman said.

This summer brought both joy and tears. "It's going to be a summer I always remember. Another world championship is tremendous. Being part of the memorial was the toughest thing as a building we ever had to do," he said.

Above: AEG's Tim Leiweke, Michael Roth, Dan Beckerman and Lee Zeidman at L.A. LIVE where the Lakers Parade started off.