

MIDWEST MEANS BUSINESS

Rock and theater move the Midwest to solid numbers

by BRAD WEISSBERG

Don't think of the Midwest as flyover states; there's serious money to be made between the coasts. Cumulatively, the venues on *Venues Today's* 2016 Midwest Top Stops charts were up a solid seven percent over 2015, reporting concert and event grosses of \$368 million, up from \$321 million. In-demand acts, higher ticket prices, the improving economy and good fortune in routing account for the increase, according to the venue operators interviewed.

(Clockwise from top left) Luke Byran, U.S. Bank Stadium, Minneapolis (Photo Credit: Joe Lemke, SMG and U.S. Bank Stadium); U.S. Bank Stadium, Minneapolis (Photo Credit: Steve Bergerson, SMG and U.S. Bank Stadium); Fans sing along to Prince's hit song, "Purple Rain", prior to Mumford & Sons taking the stage on the day of his passing at Xcel Energy Center, Saint Paul, Minn. (Photo Credit: Xcel Energy Center); Coldplay, BOK Center, Tulsa, Okla., and "The Book of Mormon" playing at Orpheum Theater, Omaha, Neb.

The \$113-billion **U.S. BANK STADIUM**, Minneapolis, opened in July 2016. Since then, it's hosted 168 million guests. "It's an amazing building and has performed extremely well," said Patrick Talty, GM. "Building openings are tough, but we've done a great job of hitting the ground running and meeting high expectations. In fact, we've been more successful than we predicted."

The first event was a sold-out Chelsea vs. AC Milan international soccer game. "We blew it out of the water," said Talty. "This was quickly followed by back-to-back Luke Bryan and Metallica concerts." Vikings football fol-

lowed, then three Monster Truck shows, a Supercross — plus another 400 events.

Tickets ranged from \$25-\$200 and Talty said the venue easily met its \$6.75 million net operating guarantee. Per caps were around \$2 for college baseball and went as high as \$29 for the bigger events.

Food and beverage (F&B) is provided by Aramark. "The catering operation is exceeding all expectations," he said. "Minneapolis is a foodie scene, and Aramark did a great job of finding local flavors the people love. We have craft beers, celebrity chefs and Aramark went out their way to include minority suppliers such as T-Rex cookies and Lola's Wings."

Security is provided by Monterey Security. "We have a strong integrated command center with a lot of technology in place," he said. "We're constantly looking at how to make a better fan experience and keep everyone as safe as we can."

Talty's prognosis for the rest of 2017 is equally sunny. "X-Games are coming this summer, Guns N' Roses, Coldplay, and Justin Bieber are booked, and there's a little thing called Super Bowl 52 headed to U.S. Bank

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Based on concert and event grosses from Feb. 1, 2016 – Jan. 31, 2017, as reported to *Venues Today*.

VENUE, LOCATION	NO. OF SEATS	TOTAL GROSS	ATTENDANCE	SHOWS
> 30,000 AND MORE CAPACITY				
1. U.S. Bank Stadium, Minneapolis	66,000	\$5,158,790	48,492	1
2. Miller Park, Milwaukee	41,900	\$4,812,602	31,342	1
3. Busch Stadium, Saint Louis, Mo.	46,861	\$4,657,982	43,428	1
4. Arrowhead Stadium, Kansas City, Mo.	76,416	\$3,887,143	51,293	1
5. Ford Field, Detroit	46,000	\$3,807,637	45,938	1

Compiled by Monique Potter, HotTickets@venuestoday.com

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Stadium in February 2018. The world will be watching,” said Talty.

Talty said he’s focused on fan engagement and that every venue in the world needs to be

just as focused. “Without fans coming, we’d have an empty building,” he said.

“We had a really good year,” said Jack Larson, **XCEL ENERGY CENTER**, St. Paul, Minn., VP and GM, who said the venue was

up 10 percent in revenue in 2016. He attributes the bump to the success of the Minnesota Wild hockey team, the healthy number of concerts they put on and crowd-pleasing state tournaments.

“We opened the Adele tour in July,” said Larson, “We also did the sell-out Prince tribute, Bruce Springsteen, Mumford and Sons, Def Leppard, and Blake Shelton. The Earth, Wind & Fire show was a big success.” Tickets ranged from \$30-\$250.

Larson also praised the performance of his family shows, Disney On Ice and The World’s Toughest Rodeo.

Larson said that it was “a really good year” for F&B, which is provided by Levy Restaurants. “We changed a couple of clubs into all-inclusive areas that have been very well accepted,” he said. “We did chef-takeovers in our Jack Daniels Old No. 7 Club, and we were up around 10 percent in F&B as well last year.”

Improvements included a new hospitality area/bar/restaurant called The Reserve on the suite level. “We do special promotions that bring people up there,” he said. Xcel Center is evaluating what they will remodel next. “We’re 16 years old and are looking at what we can do to enhance the fan experience.”

BOK CENTER, Tulsa, Okla., was named ‘Arena Of The Year’ by the International Entertainment Buyers Association (IEBA) in 2016 and winning the award was the highlight of the year for GM Jeff Nickler. “We’ve been nominated every year since we opened in 2008, and to finally take the award home was a great acknowledgement of the 100-plus staff we have here who make the magic happen everyday.”

Tulsa has become a strong rock market, said Nickler. Big shows included Iron Maiden, Coldplay, Billy Joel, Justin Bieber, and Carrie Underwood. BOK Center was the highest-grossing date on the Pentatonix tour. “A lot of big shows across all genres of music really helped us in 2016.”

Nickler said he saw higher ticket prices across the board in 2016. The ticket price range was \$25 to \$250. “The average ticket prices were well over \$100, which is unusual for our market,” he said.

A redesign to the concession stands in 2015 brought a whopping 75-percent-increase in F&B in 2016. BOK Center also spent \$250,000 upgrading security with new magnetometers, adding additional security cameras and additional security protocols. “A lot of this wasn’t in place until this year,” he said. “The

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VENUE, LOCATION	NO. OF SEATS	TOTAL GROSS	ATTENDANCE	SHOWS
> 15,001-30,000 CAPACITY				
1. Xcel Energy Center, St. Paul, Minn.	18,568	\$29,648,879	568,619	58
2. Target Center, Minneapolis	19,500	\$21,641,488	378,188	64
3. BOK Center, Tulsa	19,199	\$20,345,013	354,161	70
4. United Center, Chicago	25,000	\$13,244,747	125,388	14
5. Sprint Center, Kansas City, Mo.	18,500	\$9,540,112	125,041	15
6. Wells Fargo Arena, Des Moines, Iowa	17,000	\$7,769,950	130,370	14
7. Mapfre Stadium, Columbus, Ohio	30,000	\$6,804,796	120,000	3
8. Allstate Arena, Rosemont, Ill.	19,000	\$6,304,732	84,680	7
9. U.S. Bank Arena, Cincinnati	17,090	\$6,199,974	74,115	12
10. BMO Harris Bradley Center, Milwaukee	19,000	\$5,098,448	63,213	10
> 10,001-15,000 CAPACITY				
1. Van Andel Arena, Grand Rapids, Mich.	12,000	\$17,932,497	360,646	65
2. Intrust Bank Arena, Wichita, Kan.	15,000	\$10,898,004	215,051	55
3. Denny Sanford Premier Cntr., Sioux Falls, S.D.	12,000	\$10,234,734	151,350	26
4. Chaifetz Arena, St. Louis	10,600	\$7,464,689	139,660	36
5. Resch Center, Green Bay, Wis.	10,500	\$6,853,556	179,589	42
6. iWireless Center, Moline, Ill.	12,000	\$6,349,528	171,530	43
7. Ford Center, Evansville, Ind.	11,000	\$6,323,308	119,555	33
8. Peoria (Ill.) Civic Center Arena	12,145	\$3,638,405	77,267	17
9. Allen County War Mem. Col., Ft. Wayne, Ind.	13,000	\$3,268,981	85,283	20
10. Alliant Energy Center, Madison, Wis.	10,230	\$1,966,048	31,537	5
> 5,001-10,000 CAPACITY				
1. Huntington Center, Toledo, Ohio	7,860	\$8,418,741	156,444	33
2. U.S. Cellular Center, Cedar Rapids, Iowa	10,000	\$2,230,035	41,990	12
3. Amsoil Arena, Duluth, Minn.	8,500	\$1,214,850	22,823	5
4. Covelli Centre, Youngstown, Ohio	5,700	\$965,060	11,934	2
5. BMO Harris Bank Center, Rockford, Ill.	10,000	\$888,742	12,293	2
6. Sanford Center, Bemidji, Minn.	6,500	\$843,507	25,705	19
7. Breese Stevens Field, Madison, Wis.	7,500	\$816,880	15,442	3
8. United Wireless Arena, Dodge City, Kan.	5,800	\$731,951	19,748	13
9. Swiftel Center, Brookings, S.D.	7,000	\$491,125	22,391	15
10. U.S. Cellular Coliseum, Bloomington, Ill.	7,600	\$478,664	10,791	4
> 2,001-5,000 CAPACITY				
1. Orpheum Theatre, Minneapolis	2,600	\$21,820,849	295,501	139
2. Chicago Theatre	3,604	\$16,371,008	272,459	93
3. DeVos Perf. Hall, Grand Rapids, Mich.	2,404	\$12,406,081	225,311	150
4. Overture Center for the Arts, Madison, Wis.	2,225	\$12,146,239	192,938	124
5. Orpheum Theater, Omaha, Neb.	2,598	\$11,879,712	186,718	107
6. Wharton Cntr. for Perf. Arts, E. Lansing, Mich.	3,763	\$9,050,635	135,968	80
7. Fox Cities Perf. Arts Center, Appleton, Wis.	2,072	\$8,330,540	131,479	111
8. Des Moines (Iowa) Civic Center	2,735	\$7,687,280	124,320	71
9. State Theatre, Minneapolis	2,181	\$5,564,382	113,309	68
10. Peoria (Ill.) Civic Center Theater	2,244	\$4,898,628	73,900	45

Compiled by Monique Potter, HotTickets@venuestoday.com

TULSA LEVERAGES TIME AND A BIG TRAVEL BUDGET

Madonna, Iron Maiden, Billy Joel and Coldplay didn't plan on routing to BOK Center, Tulsa, Okla. In fact, they all said 'no thanks' to repeated requests to play at the venue.

But Jeff Nickler, arena GM for SMG, refused to take 'no' for an answer. "Our 2016 season was made up of a lot of acts that never played the building or even the market," said Nickler. "We worked really aggressively behind the scenes to get some of the shows to come here."

"We're in the kind of market where we just can't sit around waiting for the phone to ring," he said. "The artists aren't banging down the doors to come to Tulsa to perform. We think long term. We lay the groundwork years in advance for many of the shows we book."

Nickler vigorously chased Iron Maiden for years. "We were one of only nine U.S. cities on the Book of Souls tour," said Nickler proudly. "We're a strong rock market and it took a lot of convincing them to come here so we could prove it."

Ditto for Coldplay and Piano Man Billy Joel, but Madonna took the longest, over five years of enticements. "We cultivated the relationship with Gerry Barad [COO, Live Nation Global Touring] for five years-plus and finally got Madonna to make her first-ever visit to the state of Oklahoma. It took time and effort, but it was worth everything we went through to land her."

The key ingredients to success are time and a big travel budget. "This industry is based on relationships," he said. "The amount of annual travel and budget we allocate to developing relationships is huge, in the six figures, and we've seen it really pay off." Nickler said that it takes "dozens of trips to manage and cultivate these relationships." — Brad Weissberg

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our primary tenant, our SMG corporate office and the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority, our owners, to assess opportunities that provide the best return."

Van Andel Arena bought several walk-through metal detectors in 2016 and notifies their patrons for each event through e-mail with security measures specific to the event they're attending.

MacKeigan's outlook for 2017 is strong. "The Griffins continue to draw well and are playing well, and have clinched a spot in the playoffs," he said. "Concert activity looks good with good shows on the books, including Chris Stapleton, Red Hot Chili Peppers and The Who."

"2016 was the best year we've had since we opened," said Steve Miller, SMG GM, HUNTINGTON CENTER, Toledo, Ohio. "The stars aligned for us, no pun intended." This followed Huntington Center's worst year ever in 2015. "It's a function of routing. The dates worked out for us this year."

Elton John, James Taylor, Luke Bryan, Def Leppard, Professional Bull Riders (PBR), Disney On Ice, Monster Jam and Harlem Globetrotters were highlights. "There are a lot of great shows out there, and it's a matter of

finding the right dates and the right deals," he offered.

Tickets ranged from \$10 to \$140. Huntington Center netted \$2.5 million in revenue and spent \$2.4 million.

F&B also had its best year ever, said Miller. "We were up 10-12 percent." Per caps were \$2.50-\$4 for family shows, \$8-8.50 for hockey and \$10-\$12 for concerts. The concessionaire is AVI Food Systems.

Security has been "a topic of conversation" and "we've been vigilant about training," he said. Huntington Center invested \$30,000 to buy 14 magnetometers. "We're doing it for all the concerts," he said, "Live Nation is demanding it and so are the artists. We're fine with it."

The rest 2017 is "looking great" and Miller wanted to be sure to mention that without the promoters and his partnerships with them, "we wouldn't have success in Toledo."

"It's been a terrific year," said Joan Squires, president of Omaha Performing Arts, which runs the HOLLAND PERFORMING ARTS CENTER and ORPHEUM THEATER, Omaha, Neb. "We've had an uptick in attendance, prices are up, the economy is good and people are looking for things to do."

At the Holland Performing Arts Center the highest grossing acts were Yo Yo Ma, Garrison Keillor, Jethro Tull and Joe

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> 2,000 AND FEWER CAPACITY				
1. Holland Perf. Arts Center, Omaha, Neb.	2,000	\$4,308,488	95,536	85
2. Royal Oak (Mich.) Music Theatre	1,800	\$3,407,351	101,433	80
3. Paramount Theatre, Cedar Rapids, Iowa	1,901	\$2,300,540	49,800	48
4. Vic, Chicago	1,400	\$1,993,372	60,323	58
5. Pantages Theatre, Minneapolis	1,014	\$1,395,571	35,750	53
6. Orpheum Theatre, Wichita, Kan.	1,328	\$1,091,497	16,669	26
7. Victory Theatre, Evansville, Ind.	1,950	\$982,833	23,962	31
8. Park West, Chicago	1,150	\$883,747	29,432	44
9. Orpheum Theater, Madison, Wis.	1,750	\$591,084	5,012	2
10. Mill City Nights, Minneapolis	1,500	\$528,856	22,384	50

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