

OFF TO THE FARM

The Music Farm brand expands into Columbia

by JESSICA BOUDEVIN



Construction for Music Farm Columbia took about five months. (Photo by Music Farm Productions)

It was a market that needed a venue. With more than 30,000 students on campus at nearby University of South Carolina, the area was in need of a space that could bring in quality and affordable entertainment. Music Farm Productions filled that niche with the opening of the 1,200-capacity Music Farm Columbia, Sept. 21.

“Having this size venue in Columbia is a new thing in the market, but agents and artists are always trying to play here because it’s a college market,” said Music Farm Productions’ Marshall Lowe. “Having the venue and now being open, it’s been great to hear the artists’ responses.”

“They want to come back and are spreading the word to other artists and agents, so calls are starting to pick up and come in,” he added.

After opening with a performance by

Marc Broussard, the facility hosted the Road to College DJ Championships with Ookay, Oct. 4; The Revivalists, Oct. 8; Corey Smith, Oct. 10; Sister Hazel, Oct. 16; and Big Gigantic, Oct. 30. Music Farm Columbia is slated to host about 100-150 shows each year, with about 90 percent consisting of nationally-touring acts.

“Because this is the first venue of its kind in Columbia, we’re still exploring all types of shows to get a better gauge of what works best,” said Steve Greene, Sr. Talent Buyer & Festival Programming at AC Entertainment, which began a partnership with Music Farm Charleston and Music Farm Columbia in August. The company has been working with Music Farm Charleston since 2008.

AC Entertainment will be programming the new venue similarly to other clubs the company buys for, “while always making sure that we are bringing up-and-coming artists as well

as those that have already made their way into our hearts.”

Music Farm Productions partnered with Tin Roof, an attached restaurant and bar that hosts regional and local bands, to create Music Farm Columbia, with the two buildings actually connected. Gutting the space and starting from scratch to build the new facility required an overall investment of more than \$1 million and about five months.

“Obviously it’s a long-term investment — and it wasn’t cheap,” said Music Farm Productions’ Trae Judy. “We had to build staging, lighting, all new electrical, plumbing, a sprinkler system, and new fencing outside, and redo the parking lots, plus the box offices and patio, as well as reconfigure the load-in area.”

The company worked with ACS Productions Sound and Lighting on a production, sound and lighting package, which about 80 percent of bands that have played at the venue use.

Music Farm has taken advantage of the ability to integrate ticketing with marketing provided by Ticketfly, which they have been using at the Charleston venue for more than a year and now use in Columbia. With the opening of a new venue, it was important to not only maintain Music Farm’s brand, but also to evolve in a way that would appeal to multiple markets.

The company had used the same website for more than six years, so it got together with its partner, Ticketfly, to design a fresh look and feel for the brand which was then infused into every customer touchpoint, beginning with a new website.

Through Ticketfly, Music Farm obtained demographic information to automate email

marketing and tailored social media campaigns for fans based on interest.

The company helps save time and increase ticket sales by bringing tools for both marketing and analytics together with ticketing. Once you enter event information in once, it publishes everywhere, including a venue's website, e-blasts, social media channels, and Ticketfly's network of affiliates.

"A lot of the power of what we do comes from automation and optimization," said Ticketfly CEO and Co-founder Andrew Dreskin.

Venues are also able to extract and use data, such as which email subject lines drive the highest open rates, and the effectiveness of display advertising vs. search-targeted advertising.

"Because it's so much easier to automatically push content about our events to Facebook, Twitter, and other social channels, our marketing team focuses more time on designing content and creative contests," said Judy, who added that the company also uses Ticketfly's analytics tool, Fanbase, to reward top fans.

Dreskin said that the company also provides guidance when it comes to leveraging social media to engage the community.

"Music Farm has done a great job at cultivating conversations with fans through an authentic voice and creative contests that build excitement around upcoming events," he said.

Judy also focuses on building community the old-fashioned way, setting up meetings with city managers, city police, and local businesses "early, instead of waiting until something might go wrong," he said, adding that the key to success is treating the music business like any other business that would open in town.

"With every market we try to become part of the community, not just be those crazy rocker guys that wear the Chuck Taylors," added Judy. 

Interviewed for this story: **Andrew Dreskin**, (415) 798-2395; **Steve Greene**, (865) 523-2665; **Trae Judy**, (864) 706-8723; **Marshall Lowe**, (803) 629-9603

CAPITAL CITY... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

The Miss South Carolina Pageant broadcasts from Township Auditorium, but CMCC is the venue of choice for the pageant's annual gala. The Lexington Tennis Complex uses the convention center for an off-site reception during the USTA Junior Team Sectionals.

NEW GROWTH

Colonial Life Arena, managed by Global Spectrum, opened in November and, as the crown jewel of the University of South Carolina, has a seating capacity of nearly 18,000 for basketball and up to 19,000 for other events. The arena features 41 suites, four Entertainment Suites and the Frank McGuire Club, a full-service hospitality room.

"Since our opening in 2002, the arena alone has generated \$4 million in admissions and business license taxes that has been directly reinvested into the local community," said GM Lexie Boone.

Boone said that the music scene is exploding, and attributes that to a changing culture and with credit to some of Columbia's local and national promoters who have played a major role.

Challenges in the venue's daily operations include educating people in the industry on the change in culture in Columbia.

"We're here living it, seeing it, breathing it," he said. "But we have to get the word out to those that, in some cases, are thousands of miles away that are routing these tours, and let them know what's happening. The only way to prove it is to take advantage of every opportunity to book shows and then sell tickets."

While acknowledging it is not quite as quotable, Boone called on a line from *Field of Dreams*.

"In the movie, Ray heard a voice telling him, 'If you build it, they will come,'" he said. "But we're not playing baseball in cornfields. If you build it, book it, market it, then sell tickets and service your customers, they will come, and hopefully keep coming back." 

Interviewed for this story: **Lexie Boone**, (803) 576-9050; **Nancy Smith**, (803) 799-3387; **Mack Stone**, (800) 264-4884

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE AT SEVT

The 2014 Sport, Entertainment and Venues Tomorrow conference will kick off Nov. 19 in Columbia, S.C. The day will culminate in a reception at the new Music Farm Columbia, one of many great networking opportunities.

Program highlights are numerous, but it is worth noting performing arts centers interests are well represented.

"With the hiring of Dr. Armen Shaomian a couple of years ago, the performing arts-related coursework in the University of South Carolina's Department of Sport & Entertainment Management has grown significantly," noted Frank Roach, USC professor and co-organizer of SEVT, which is presented by USC and *Venues Today*.

At this year's conference, three panels will include performing arts professionals along with those from other segments of the industry:

"What's Next in Ticket Technology" will be moderated by Maureen Shallcross from Greenville, S.C.'s Peace Center

"How to Get More From Donors in Sports and Performing Arts" will feature Fox Theatre's Adina Erwin and Robin Hallyburton from the South Carolina Philharmonic and will be moderated by Dr. Shaomian.

"Ticket Pricing: How It's Done" will include South Carolina Philharmonic Executive Director, Rhonda Hunsinger.

Additionally, *Venues Today's* "Generation Next" and "Women of Influence" recipients will share their knowledge, and key executives such as Lifetime Achievement Recipient Kenneth Feld and Pioneer Award Recipient Jane Kleinberger will speak. There is even an academic session on "Corporate Sponsorship in a Non-profit Environment."

Lastly, the inspiring keynote address on High Impact Leadership will be delivered by professional speaker and former President of Kiwanis International, Rob Parker, now CEO of Zac Brown's Southern Ground.

Registration and additional information are available at www.SEVT.org.