

**SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25**  
**DULUTH INCOME UP 30 PERCENT**

“We’ve had the best first six months in the history of the building,” said Joey Dennis, general manager, **INFINITE ENERGY CENTER**, Duluth, Ga. The arena is part of Gwinnett

duced craft beer, which are selling briskly.

The complex is gearing up for a major renovation. The goal is to make the complex into an entertainment district. “This will be the biggest makeover the complex has ever seen,” said Dennis.

The naming rights deal with Infinite Energy has brought money to the table. “It’s a 20-year deal and we just signed for it last year,” said Dennis. “We get \$850,000 a year for the first 10 years and \$950,000 a year for the next 10 years.”

Dennis also said they were looking for funding for a \$35-million improvement to the arena. “We’re going to build a sports bar themed restaurant in the lobby of the arena and we’re also going to build a private club.”

Dennis was also preparing for a new law that will allow guests to drink beer and wine outside. “This will allow our guests to buy a beverage at one of the venues and bring it outside or into another of the venues. Previously the alcohol had to be consumed in the individual venues which was prohibitive.”

The annual budget for both the arena and the convention center is \$12 million.

**BUSINESS STRONG IN COLUMBIA**

“Business has been good,” said Sid Kenyon, general manager, University of South Carolina’s **COLONIAL LIFE ARENA**, Columbia. “We look at a 10-year average and we’re trending ahead so far this year.” Kenyon estimates that Colonial Life Arena has seen a five percent to 10 percent increase in 2016.

Kenyon attributes the bump to “strong relationships with agents and promoters and the fan-friendly inventory of talent that is going out right now.” He also pointed out that, as a university building, the arena has to make way for university events and some years they get to schedule more events than other years. “This year we’ve had more dates available to book and that’s helped as well.”

The best selling shows this year were Pearl Jam and Maroon 5. “We do pretty well with rock,” said Kenyon. “We also do well with country. We’ve got Carrie Underwood coming next week and we expect 12,000 guests.”

Tickets run \$40-\$150. The operating budget is \$5 million.

Food and beverage is up as well. Kenyon was both surprised and happy that healthy

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TOPSTOPS THE CAROLINAS   2016				
Based on concert and event grosses from Aug. 1, 2015 – July 31, 2016, as reported to <i>Venues Today</i> .				
VENUE, LOCATION	NO. OF SEATS	TOTAL GROSS	ATTENDANCE	SHOWS
<b>1. Durham (N.C.) Performing Arts Center</b>	<b>2,800</b>	<b>\$29,460,676</b>	<b>482,393</b>	<b>216</b>
2. Peace Center, Greenville, S.C.	2,100	\$12,628,171	173,113	108
3. Spectrum Center, Charlotte, N.C.	20,200	\$11,041,868	246,980	45
4. Greensboro (N.C.) Coliseum	23,500	\$8,106,638	114,351	20
5. Colonial Life Arena, Columbia, S.C.	18,000	\$5,476,951	153,446	39
6. Charlotte Motor Speedway, Concord, N.C.	140,000	\$5,063,330	90,091	3
7. Crown Complex, Fayetteville, N.C.	10,880	\$3,158,617	154,048	87
8. MUSC Health Stadium, Charleston, S.C.	17,000	\$2,363,315	24,411	2
9. Florence (S.C.) Civic Center	9,500	\$1,738,131	51,787	31
10. Charleston (S.C.) Music Hall	906	\$1,253,812	30,955	47

Compiled by Monique Potter, HotTickets@venuestoday.com

Center, which also includes a performing arts center and a convention center.

Dennis estimated that translates into a whopping 30 percent revenue increase. He attributes that to a strong economy and the timing this year for getting strong shows and concerts. “The Atlanta economy is booming again and we’ve been getting solid shows that are selling well,” said Dennis.

“We’ve got a great history of repeat business at the convention center,” said Dennis, “Probably 70 percent of our events are repeat events.”

Family shows do well at Infinite Energy Center; this year saw two weeks of Ringling Bros. and Barnum& Bailey Circus and several ice shows. On the concert side, Dennis said, “anything country always does really well for us.” Dennis said they typically generate \$15 million a year in ticket sales in the arena. Ticket prices range from \$12 to \$350. “The average is around \$55.”

Automated drink machines have improved beverage sales and they’ve intro-

The facilities are now on 110 acres and they just purchased an additional 20 acres.

“We’re working on a traffic plan and have 35 acres set aside for the development,” he said. Already in the works is a plan to build a headquarters hotel, which will cost between \$50-\$80 million. “It will physically be attached to the arena and the convention center, which we now call The Forum.”

“The renovations and entertainment district will be a public/private partnership,” said Dennis. “We’re currently going through the Request For Proposal (RFP) process to find the best developer for the new land.” The rest of the funding for the entertainment district is still undetermined until a private partner is selected.

From the public side, \$67 million has been earmarked for expansion of the convention center. “We currently have 50,000 sq. ft. in the convention center and want to increase that to about 110,000 sq. ft.,” he said. “We need break-out rooms. And we’re going to build a food court in the convention center.”