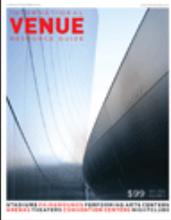


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A WEEKLY PUBLICATION FROM VENUES TODAY

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Quote of the Week

“Even as large as McCormick Place is, the business model of running a convention center is pretty much the same.”

– Gregg Caren with SMG on the company's new management contract with the nation's largest convention center - McCormick Place in Chicago.

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[Disasters and bin Ladin's Death Have Facilities on High Alert](#)

Greetings {FIRST_NAME},

Welcome to VT Pulse, your weekly guide to the "News Behind the Headlines." Congratulations to the winners of our inaugural Generation Next Award: Cara Vanderhook from Staples Center and L.A. Live, Katie Pandolfo from the Home Depot Center in Carson, Calif., Barry Kahn from Qcue, Carl Mittleman from Aramark and our Readers Choice Award Winner Jon Petrunak from SMG.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR WINNERS!



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venues
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SHORT TAKES

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY EXTENDS PACIOLAN PARTNERSHIP >> After 23 years, Marshall University Athletics has renewed its contract for Paciolan's ticketing system. From 2009 to 2010, Marshall saw its biggest historical increase in season ticket sales – more than 65 percent.

Contact: Tila Pacheco, (714) 256-8452

SMART CITY NETWORKS CONTINUES TO SERVICE WASHINGTON STATE CONVENTION CENTER

>> Seattle's Washington State Convention Center has

Barry Kahn, President, Qcue

Carl Mittleman, Regional VP, Aramark Sports & Entertainment-Central Region

Katie Pandolfo, GM, Home Depot Center

Jon Petrunak, VP, SMG Booking
Generation Next Readers' Choice

Cara Vanderhook, Sr. Manager, Communications, Staples Center, Nokia Theatre at L.A. Live

VT NEWS

DEALS

SMG CHOSEN TO MANAGE MCCORMICK PLACE

McCormick Place, Chicago



SMG is the new private management firm for Chicago's McCormick Place. The management company signed a five-year contract for a base fee of \$450,000 per year, which will be adjusted up to three percent for inflation. There is an option for renewal by mutual consent at the culmination of the five years. Also, there are incentive portions of the management agreement that would allow for a maximum of an additional \$450,000 for SMG in bonuses if they reach agreed upon revenue, expense reduction and customer satisfaction goals. McCormick Place is owned by the Metropolitan Pier and Exhibition Authority ran the complex.

renewed its contract with Convention Communication Provisioners, a subsidiary of Smart City Networks, for an additional two years. The event technology service company has provided telecommunications, data and internet services at the convention center for 10 years.

Contact: Amy E. S. Maier,
(702) 967-2296

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Gregg Caren, senior VP/Strategic Business Development for SMG, said that the transition into private management is two-tiered. "The transition we're doing immediately is making McCormick Place an SMG facility by putting our financial systems and our accounting methodologies in place." SMG's contract officially started April 26, when the agreement was signed and executed. Caren explained that SMG "wants to make sure everything with the Authority is dealt with properly as far as benefits, pensions and 401k plans," so complete transitions of employees onto the SMG payroll may take until July. However, he added that SMG will have an immediate presence at the complex to help analyze the progress of the transition and enact any necessary adjustments.

Caren said the biggest change will be "the concept of running McCormick like a business." Caren remembers being surprised that there aren't many events of the mid-sized or smaller scale at the convention center. He shared that SMG is "going to be trying to sell shorter terms with some smaller events." Each of the four main sections of the building is bigger than some convention centers, so "we see the opportunity to start looking at an individual building as a stand alone center," he added.

Although some things will be different, SMG is committed to keeping those aspects of the operation that work. For instance, David Causton has been re-appointed as GM of the facility. He worked as general manager for McCormick Place before the change to private management.

Causton doesn't foresee his position shifting much. "I will still be the overall manager of the facility and lead not only the sales and management side but also the operations and procuring side," he explained. "I don't know if much will change as it relates to my day-to-day activities." He thinks that SMG was a good fit for McCormick Place because the management company is in so many facilities around the world.

Although there are particular challenges that SMG faces when it comes to managing McCormick Place, size isn't one of them. "The challenges are the same across the board – it's about trying to make sure that our customers have a pleasant experience," Causton said.

Caren agreed. "Even as large as McCormick Place is," he said, "the business model of running a convention center is pretty much the same."

The contract comes after a U.S. District Court ruled against reform legislation for center, passed by the Illinois State Assembly, to reduce labor costs at McCormick. The May 2010 legislation focused on "the elimination of overhead and exclusives" and show organizers are now able to pick their own electrical contractor as opposed to going through the unions. Causton revealed that the legislation "required the Authority to enter an agreement to have McCormick Place under private management."

Some aspects of the reform legislation are in jeopardy after a March 31 ruling by U.S. District Judge Ronald Guzman to throw out parts of the new labor rules. In question is a change that would allow exhibitors to do some of their own labor, bypassing the unions. However, the convention center plans to appeal this ruling and Guzman has yet to issue an injunction that

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will implement his ruling. As of now, Caren is looking forward to “making sure that the service gets delivered to the organizers and that the unions and building and management work together for the common good,” noting that SMG has achieved this cooperation in convention centers in other union facilities they manage. He doesn’t see the union situation as a liability for SMG in the slightest and believes “in constructive engagement and dealing with unions as a business partner.” – Jessica Boudevin

Interviewed for this story: Gregg Caren, (610) 729-7922; David Causton, (312) 446-3006.



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BEHIND THE HEADLINES

DISASTERS AND BIN LADEN’S DEATH HAVE FACILITIES ON NOTICE

Boutwell Auditorium in Birmingham, Ala., served as a Red Cross Shelter for tornado victims.

rob@venuestoday.com

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Experience

The Edge, Auckland, New
Zealand - Head of
Programming and Presenter
Services



Recent news of Midwest floods, massive tornadoes in Alabama and the killing of terrorist leader Osama Bin Laden have venue managers on high alert.

An April 27 tornado that killed hundreds of people in Alabama left most of the state's venues unscathed, including most of the campus of the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa and its Bryant Denny Stadium, home to the 2010 BCS champion football program.

Cathy Andreen, with the school's media affairs department, said the campus was closed early because of the tornado, with last Friday's finals postponed until August along with the school's plans for a graduation ceremony. Six students from the University of Alabama died when the mile-wide tornado ripped through their town.

"The school is empty now, save for a few critical personnel," Andreen said. "Most of the athletics department (which manages the stadium) has gone on leave to clean up debris left behind by the tornado." Many campus employees lost their homes in the disaster, she said.

Activities at the large Southeastern Conference school haven't totally subsided — a multigame baseball series with Louisiana State University is scheduled for this weekend. And Andreen said the school's Recreation Center is back to normal, after serving as a temporary shelter for as many as 65 people immediately following the tornado.

Boutwell Auditorium in Birmingham, Ala., is the largest performance venue in the state to serve as a shelter, with several hundred people taking refuge at the 6,000-capacity arena, confirmed Alicia Brown in the city's Public Information Office. The tornado didn't postpone the Birmingham

Sydney Opera House -
Commercial Operations
Manager

SMG Richmond (Va.) -
Director of Sales &
Marketing

City of Sioux City, Ia. -
Maintenance and
Engineering Supervisor

Ordway Center for the
Performing Arts, St. Paul,
Minn. - Sales & Ticketing
Manager

Florida (Tallahassee) State
University-School of Theatre
- Fine Arts Ticket Office

Patron Technology, New
York - Client Training &
Education Manager

Jazz at Lincoln Center, New
York - Database/Application
Analyst

Shenandoah University,
Winchester, Va. - Box Office
Manager

SMG/Louisiana (New
Orleans) Superdome - Asst.
Box Office Manager

Hershey Entertainment &
Resorts, Pa. - Asst. Manager,
Event Ticketing

Madison Project dba The
Broad Stage, Santa Monica,
Calif. - Box Office
Fulfillment Associate

Public Information Office. The tornado didn't postpone the Birmingham Schaffer Eye Center Crawfish Boil on Saturday (April 30), which sold 16,000 tickets, according to Brown. Entertainment included Cee Lo Green, Weezer, Stone Temple Pilots and Nelly.

The Black River Coliseum in Poplar Bluff, Mo., was also used as an emergency shelter, after a levee breach in the city brought floodwaters from the St. Francis River that destroyed 1,000 homes.

Assistant Operations Manager Dale Pigg said the 5,000-seat facility hosted as many as 300 to 325 over six days. "The Red Cross provided food and medical supplies, we just provided the building," he said.

The tornadoes and floods weren't the only news items to catch the attention of venue managers. Sunday night's announcement that Navy Seal commandos had killed Bin Laden meant a heightened level of security for venues as American officials warned of possible reprisal attacks.

"We're stepping it up a notch for two reasons — it's playoff basketball and the recent news about Bin Laden," said Brad Mayne from the American Airlines Center in Dallas. The venue's resident Dallas Mavericks are one of eight teams battling it out during the second round of the playoffs. The National Hockey League also has eight teams fighting for the Stanley Cup in the second round of its playoff series.

"It's a double edged sword — if you go public and tell people what you're doing, you run the risk that people might get concerned and not come out," he said, adding that the increased security precautions meant more police and security personnel, and more random screenings and searches going into the building. Mayne said he didn't want patrons to be inconvenienced by the heightened security.

Gary Desjardins from the Oklahoma City Arena said his facility was also taking additional security steps at the advice of the Department of Homeland Security, but "at this point, we're not aware of any direct threats. Most people expect there would be a heightened security risk in the short term," he said.

The same goes for Canada, which has only one team left in the second round of the NHL playoffs.

"We look at it a little bit differently but, at the same time, we are sensitive that others view Canada as an ally to the U.S., and we certainly recognize that this could be a sensitive time and we're taking that into consideration in our planning," said Harvey Jones at the Rogers Centre, home to the top-rated Vancouver Canucks, who are battling the Nashville Predators this week.

Lee Zeidman of the Staples Center in Los Angeles, home to last year's championship Lakers, said his building is also on heightened alert, with staff and security trained to be "more vigilant, more aware due to what is happening in the world." The facility recently implemented a text-message security system with In Stadium Solutions, which allows patrons to text security personnel if they see something suspicious. The text message

platform is a complement to the facility's program with the Department of Homeland Security, which runs PSAs for its "See Something, Say Something" campaign.

"We live in a high profile city, we need to have our eyes and ears open – people need to be aware of what's going on," Zeidman said. – Dave Brooks

Interviewed for this article: Cathy Andreen, (205) 348-7245; Alicia Brown, (205) 254-2000; Dale Pigg, (573) 686-8006; Brad Mayne, (214) 665-4220; Gary Desjardins, (405) 602-8500; Harvey Jones, (604) 899-7400; Lee Zeidman, (213) 742-7255



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PERFORMING ARTS

OTTAWA TAKES ADVANTAGE OF CAPITAL LOCATION WITH NEW CONVENTION CENTER

A school choir sings the Canadian National Anthem during the opening of the Ottawa Convention Centre.



The Ottawa Convention Centre reopened April 13, with a party that included a free concert for the 1,300 guests. The \$170-million, 192,000-sq.-ft venue replaces the Ottawa Congress Centre, opened in 1985 and demolished in 2009.

The Ottawa Convention Centre is owned by the Crown Agency of the Province of Ontario. Construction funding for the project included \$50 million from the federal government, \$50 million from the provincial government and \$40 million from the city of Ottawa.

In an unusual move, the convention center debt financed the outstanding \$30 million into a 25-year amortization vehicle.

“It’s a bit unusual in the convention center business,” said Ottawa Convention Centre President Patrick Kelly. “One of the reasons we felt we would be able to accommodate this is because a large part of our business will come from the local marketplace. We’ve very effectively filled most of our holes with non-convention events.”

The operating budget for the facility begins at \$16 million and jumps to \$25 million by 2016 – a large part of the increase due to the debt payments. Kelly projects revenues will follow the same pattern.

Aramark has been brought on to handle food production and food service, as well as convention services, convention planning, housekeeping and maintenance. The management contract is for 15 years, with financial details not disclosed.

The Crown Agency will handle marketing, strategic branding and direct sales. Kelly said his team will book events, and Aramark will oversee execution and operation. The general manager for Aramark at the facility is Jennifer McCrary, formerly with the Palm Beach (Fla.) Convention Center.

Being in the capital of Canada, the convention center is expected to do a brisk business with government contractors, said Kelly, estimating they will make up 15-to-20 percent of bookings at the building.

“We have two large political party national conventions this year and, in the past, they were unable to meet in Ottawa because there was no building big enough to host them,” Kelly said. He expects 3,500 delegates to attend the National Conservative Party Convention in June.

The main source of business will be the Canadian association market, the vast majority of which are located in the nation’s capital, as happens in the U.S. in Washington. Kelly said the center has 91 major conventions booked over the next five years, and he’s looking to add dozens more as he markets Ottawa as a destination city. There’s also a \$10,000 grant program for nonprofit groups that want to rent the building to host events of an “altruistic nature,” Kelly said – 10 grants have been awarded so far.

“This city has everything, including an active World Heritage Site,” he said, describing the nearby Rideau Canal, which sits adjacent to the convention

center. “The only thing missing was a world class convention center. Since we announced, we’ve been active in the marketplace, selling for the past two years. As soon as we had definitive floor plans and room specs from the designer, we started selling.”

The building is attempting to achieve LEED Silver designation. It used building materials from the old convention center and recycled 88 percent of construction debris into other projects. The building has a white roof that reflects heat in the summer time, while the front of the building is made of 1,100 triangular glass panels, treated with a special material “that efficiently reflects the sun’s rays in the summer time, allowing light in but not heat.”

Kelly said the building also includes a public art project called the Wall of Three Rivers, which starts at the front door and runs the entire height of the building, up to the fourth floor.

“The lumber used to build the wall was pulled from the bottom of the Ottawa river,” he said. The logs are believed to have sat underwater for over 150 years – a local logging company used sonar radar to locate and extract the logs for the art project. – Dave Brooks

Interviewed for this article: Pat Kelly, (613) 688-8208

BOOKINGS

IDENTITY ELECTRONIC TOUR SET FOR SUMMER

Kaskade



For years, veteran electronic artists such as the Chemical Brothers and Fatboy Slim and newer stars such as Deadmau5 and Booka Shade have kept the profile of their computer-based music high by touring the globe nonstop. Whether playing DJ club gigs or main stage extravaganzas with giant LED-splashed effects at festivals such as Coachella, Bonnaroo and Lollapalooza, the genre has managed to stay vibrant for more than 20 years

without a major touring festival.

All of that could change this summer with the launch of the Identity tour, a traveling electronic music fest that will play major sheds in 20 cities. The North American tour will hit stages in August and September and feature a slew of major acts, including Kaskade, Pretty Lights, Rusko, Steve Aoki, Disco Biscuits, DJ Shadow, Skrillex, Pete Tong, Booka Shade, Modeselektor and the Crystal Method.

Identity is the first-ever attempt at mounting an electronic festival in the U.S. and promoters are promising a “full electronic music experience” on multiple stages beginning in the afternoon and continuing into the night. So, after years of trying to build a market for this style of music in America, Joel Zimmerman, head of the WME (William Morris Electronic) department at William Morris Endeavor (also WME), said the timing is just right this summer.

“Part of it is timing and part of it is awareness,” said Zimmerman, who was brought in to head the WME division more than three years ago in anticipation of this kind of critical mass.

“Everyone is a bit smarter than we were about this area of music, and I knew mainstream promoters wanted to get into this world but didn’t know how,” he said. That three-year education process for rock promoters reached its peak with the crossover success of WME’s Deadmau5, who has grown from a club play to a potential amphitheater or arena act.

Seeing lots of potential in second and third tier markets that are hungry for this kind of music in the summer - when there is little electronic music for fans to see outside of a few spots at major festivals - Zimmerman said he focused on college markets and major cities as potential markets for Identity.

The key, he said, is three stages of music at a low price point. Tickets sell for an average of \$50 in most markets – a major come-down from the \$100 or so charged by such big one-off destination fests as Las Vegas’ Electric Daisy Carnival. Since the announcement of the lineup, Zimmerman said the fest’s Facebook page has been adding fans at a clip of one every five seconds.

Expecting to attract an audience in the 16-35-year-old range, Zimmerman said social media will be a big part of the hype machine driving Identity. From May 12-17, the tour’s Facebook page will “unlock” the names of four markets which the show will hit. Though the venues are set, in order to drive traffic and excitement, the dates will be unlocked based on audience demand. The lineups for each show and set times will then be revealed on May 20.

“I’m expecting that this will be a slam dunk,” Zimmerman said when asked what his attendance goal is. “This is the first festival that’s going into amphitheaters that are all GA (general admission) and we’re going to offer an early bird ticket that’s even less than the one we discussed.”

While he declined to discuss the costs of mounting the tour or the expected grosses, Zimmerman said he has “20 opportunities to get it right,” so there is some headroom for dates that hit and ones that miss. “If we hit our averages, it shouldn’t be a money-losing proposition,” he said, noting that in addition to the 6,000-8,000 seat pavilions and their ancillary lawns, plans call for setting up stages on the concourse and in adjacent parking lots and fields for a potential 20,000-25,000 draw in some markets.

One of the headliners, Kaskade (born Ryan Raddon), said the launch of

Identity is the culmination of years of slow, steady buildup of the electronic fan base in the U.S. Remembering the first wave of electronic superstars who never quite reached the expected peaks more than a decade ago, Raddon said he’s seen this new wave slowly break from clubs into larger and larger venues over the past two or three years. “Back then, there wasn’t enough depth, whereas I feel like this second time around there are so many more artists who have been developed in America on the underground and it’s had time to soak in ... I feel like this is it and I’m really super excited for this tour.”

He said that within the first 72 hours after the April 28 announcement of the lineup his Facebook page was inundated with messages from excited fans, a key to the tour’s success. “Most of the acts on this tour are not on a major label and we all have direct communication with our fans through Facebook and Twitter,” he said of his and his fellow artists’ primary means of setting up a grassroots fan base. “I’ve already set up those systems and it’s easy to reach out to that audience and tell them that this is something cool and different.”

Because not all the venues are in urban areas, Zimmerman is encouraging parents of underage attendees to drive their kids to Identity and will make a concerted effort to have information online about making the events safe, with shows ending at 11 p.m. “Most of that bad stuff happens after midnight,” he said. “We will go above and beyond to make it safe. Drug taking is rampant at any concert, not just electronic music events. That won’t change, but we can beef things up so not only is the festival protected, but everyone can have a good experience. “ – Gil Kaufman

Interviewed for this story: Joel Zimmerman, (310) 859-4000; Kaskade, (818) 380-0400 x223

HOTTickets

HOT TICKETS is a weekly summary of the top acts and ticket sales as reported to VT PULSE. Following are the top 20 concerts and events, the top 5 in each seating capacity category, which took place since April 6.

LEAVE IT TO BIEBER TO SELL OUT TWO ARENAS DOWN UNDER

15,001 or More Seats	10,001-15,000 Seats	5,001-10,000 Seats	5,000 or Less Seats
1) Justin Bieber	1) Justin Bieber	1) Madagascar Live!	1) Wicked

<p>Gross Sales: \$2,928,649; Venue: Acer Arena, Sydney; Attendance: 29,481; Ticket Range: \$104.08-\$71.21; Promoter: Frontier Touring Company; Dates: April 28-29; No. of Shows: 2</p> <p>2) Lady Gaga Gross Sales: \$1,773,080; Venue: Bell Centre, Montreal; Attendance: 15,641; Ticket Range: \$184.23-\$52.10; Promoter: evenko; Dates: April 25; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p>3) Lady Gaga Gross Sales: \$1,522,375; Venue: Bridgestone Arena, Nashville, Tenn.; Attendance: 14,707; Ticket Range: \$177.50-\$52; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: April 19; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p>4) Rush Gross Sales: \$1,292,089; Venue: Madison Square Garden, New York; Attendance: 13,207; Ticket Range: \$171.50-\$46; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: April 10; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p>5) Rod Stewart, Stevie Nicks Gross Sales: \$1,292,037; Venue: Madison Square Garden, New York; Attendance: 12,528; Ticket Range: \$149.50-\$49.50; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: April 6; No. of Shows: 1</p>	<p>Gross Sales: \$1,161,070; Venue: Brisbane Entertainment Centre (Australia); Attendance: 11,065; Ticket Range: \$308.33-\$70.32; Promoter: Frontier Touring Company; Dates: April 26; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p>2) Cirque du Soleil "Quidam" Gross Sales: \$1,119,964; Venue: Long Beach (Calif.) Arena; Attendance: 18,148; Ticket Range: \$115-\$40; Promoter: Cirque du Soleil; Dates: April 20-24; No. of Shows: 8</p> <p>3) Elton John Gross Sales: \$947,348; Venue: Blue Cross Arena, Rochester, N.Y.; Attendance: 11,627; Ticket Range: \$134-\$24; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: April 23; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p>4) Elton John Gross Sales: \$908,661; Venue: Rimrock Auto Arena at MetraPark, Billings, Mont.; Attendance: 10,352; Ticket Range: \$129-\$29; Promoter: AEG Live, Goldenvoice; Dates: April 10; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p>5) Elton John Gross Sales: \$811,328; Venue: Taco Bell Arena, Boise, Idaho; Attendance: 12,688; Ticket Range: \$129-\$29; Promoter: AEG Live, Goldenvoice; Dates: April 9; No. of Shows: 1</p>	<p>Gross Sales: \$2,792,613; Venue: Radio City Music Hall, New York; Attendance: 71,077; Ticket Range: \$140.50-\$24.50; Promoter: MSG Entertainment; Dates: April 15-24; No. of Shows: 18</p> <p>2) Arcade Fire Gross Sales: \$1,235,829; Venue: UIC Pavilion, Chicago; Attendance: 25,221; Ticket Range: \$49; Promoter: Jam Productions; Dates: April 22-25; No. of Shows: 3</p> <p>3) Googoosh Live in Concert Gross Sales: \$497,345; Venue: Nokia Theatre L.A. Live; Attendance: 6,873; Ticket Range: \$300-\$45; Promoter: Blue Art Productions, Inc.; Dates: April 9; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p>4) Cirque du Soleil "Alegria" Gross Sales: \$379,467; Venue: DeSoto Civic Center, Southaven, Miss.; Attendance: 5,908; Ticket Range: \$94-\$32; Promoter: Cirque du Soleil; Dates: April 27-May 1; No. of Shows: 6</p> <p>5) Robert Plant & The Band of Joy Gross Sales: \$345,555; Venue: Greek Theatre, Los Angeles; Attendance: 5,317; Ticket Range: \$95-\$40; Promoter: Nederlander; Dates: April 23; No. of Shows: 1</p>	<p>Gross Sales: \$4,886,824; Venue: Broward Center For The Perf. Arts, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; Attendance: 63,698; Ticket Range: \$154-\$36; Promoter: In-house; Dates: March 30-April 24; No. of Shows: 32</p> <p>2) Shrek The Musical Gross Sales: \$823,263; Venue: Durham (N.C.) Perf. Arts Center; Attendance: 17,353; Ticket Range: \$69-\$24; Promoter: Nederlander, PFM; Dates: April 5-10; No. of Shows: 8</p> <p>3) Rock of Ages Gross Sales: \$762,325; Venue: Civic Center of Greater Des Moines (Iowa); Attendance: 16,387; Ticket Range: \$70-\$16.50; Promoter: In-house; Dates: April 19-24; No. of Shows: 8</p> <p>4) What My Husband Doesn't Know Gross Sales: \$647,509; Venue: Beacon Theatre, New York; Attendance: 13,597; Ticket Range: \$57.50-\$45.50; Promoter: What Husbands Don't Know, LLC; Dates: April 7-10; No. of Shows: 6</p> <p>5) Paul Simon Gross Sales: \$480,646; Venue: Pantages Theatre, Los Angeles; Attendance: 5,429; Ticket Range: \$121.50-\$50; Promoter: Nederlander; Dates: April 20-21; No. of Shows: 2</p>
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Shows: 1

Compiled by Josh Huckabee. To submit reports, e-mail HotTickets@venuestoday.com or fax to (714) 378-0040.

THE BEAT

TRAVELOG

STRONG TURNOUT FOR IAVM REGION IV GATHERING IN SEATTLE

Trish Macdonald, Northlands, Edmonton, Alta., and Karen Totaro, Oregon Convention Center, Portland, were among the hosts and organizers of the Region IV meet in Seattle. Macdonald is current region director. (VT Photo)



REPORTING FROM SEATTLE – Best practices was the theme Saturday at the kickoff sessions of the April 29-May 2 International Association of Venue Managers Region IV Conference here. The gathering was attended by an impressive 280 and featured a mini-table top trade show.

The closing event Saturday, the first full day of the conference, was best food practices, with four chefs cooking up Northwest dishes to the delight of the gathered IAVM members' palates. Called IAVM Iron Chef, it featured David Dekker, executive chef, Safeco Field, for Centerplate; Jeff Hall, executive chef and director of culinary operations, Moscone Center, San Francisco, for Savor; Karl Jansson, executive chef, Meydenbauer Center; and Alex Shroff, pastry chef, Washington State Convention Center, for Aramark.

Dexter King, president; John Siehl, chairman, and Steve Flamm, CFO, all with the IAVM, gave an update on the state of the association. For the first time during the IAVM international convention, to be held in Phoenix this year, the fundraising event will be on Monday. Rather than Foundation Friday, they will

introduce Funday Monday, but it will return to Foundation Friday in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., in 2012 due to scheduling conflicts.

The rate for the Sheraton, headquarters hotel in Phoenix, is a reasonable \$139, King noted. IAVM has 3,516 members, of which 1,857 are professionals and 718 are members of the Venue Management Association in Australia, also professionals. IAVM is concentrating on a push into China and is strengthening its ties with related associations, like the DMAI (Destination Management); and the Convention Industry Council (CIC), King said.

Saturday morning, Rick Merrifield, consultant, addressed best practices in marketing. Effective marketing is a matter of differentiating the product, which may even include the risk of turning off some customers, said Merrifield. ING Direct created a banking model with no branches, no checks and no department to handle bounced checks. "They were turning their back on certain customers to create a new market segment," Merrifield noted.

Other examples included big box retailer Costco, which isn't concerned about product. They bring the customer good price and make their profit on membership fees. Newman's Own has 17 employees. Their business model is high quality and charity. They produce nothing directly and have given \$250 million to charity.

Do you know what business you are not in? Merrifield asked. For instance, Coca-Cola makes a powder and holds a patent. Coca-Cola does not sell directly to the customer, but they spend a lot on marketing.

Merrifield advised businesspeople to focus on what they are passionate about. That's what drives the economic engine.

Richard Bendix, Bendix Marketing Strategies, told Region IV members his take on branding. "Brand is not an external thing; it's internal," he said. "It's how the staff is involved with the organization."

His examples included In-N-Out Burger, which has a mystique factor. There are items sold that are not even on the menu. It's a code between staff and customers, including the 1.7 million Facebook friends of the fast food hamburger joint. "That's a brand," Bendix said.

Branding matters because it is the organization's soul, the ultimate differentiation of the product and the glue that holds it all together, Bendix said. All employees must be enabled to further the brand.

"It should be part of day-to-day business, Bendix said. "Mention it every staff meeting. Ask how did we promote the brand? You can't train attitude. Hire people who will uphold your brand."

Bendix listed the common characteristics of a successful brand as one which employees understand and have the authority to fulfill. Ritz-Carlton promises it is ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen. Each employee is trained to greet the guest by name, anticipate the guest's needs and, upon departure, use the guest's name.

Claudia Levi from the Faculty Business Management Department of Edmonds Community College, rounded out the how-to's with a talk on project planning. Her first advice was to nail down what the project looks like when you're done. That does not mean list activities; rather list objectives. For instance, it's not spackel, prime and paint; it's that on June 7, this room will be ready to have the carpeting put in, she said. "We want the outcome."

She also recommended a cross functional team from the beginning of the project; not each to his own silo. At each point in the project, a representative from every department involved in the outcome should be in on the progress.

No one really likes to look at project risk, she added, but a risk assessment needs to be done. Again, she recommends involving everyone. "People who have to do it should own it," Levi said. And do not take what seems outlandish as a fanciful fear. "What if the vendor blows up" may be unlikely but if, two years down the road when the project launches, something has happened to the vendor, wouldn't it be wise to dual source the project upfront? – Linda Deckard

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NAMING RIGHTS REPORT

Overstock.com Stadium, Oakland, Calif.

Date Announced: April 27

Terms: \$1.2 million a year for six years

Ownership: Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum Authority

Brokered: Premier Partnerships

Comments: The deal creates a new naming rights category at the home of the Oakland Raiders and Oakland Athletics – Internet retailer. Overstock.com is similar to Amazon.com, selling everything from Bulova watches to patio furniture to millions of discount-savvy consumers.

The deal is far less lucrative than other National Football League or Major League Baseball deals, but broker Jesse Ryback from Premier Partnerships said the value proposition was the key to signing Overstock.com.

"We didn't want to diminish the fact that the Coliseum is an older building," he said of the stadium, built in 1967. "Older buildings typically have less expensive naming rights deals – but the exposure from hosting two sports teams is still the same. There are few opportunities to get in front of that many eyeballs for that little money. Most of the opportunities out there are for new facilities."

The Coliseum is also located along the busy 880 freeway, used by millions of commuters each year commuting between Oakland, San Francisco and San Jose. Changeover expenses are estimated to be around \$250,000, which Overstock.com will cover. All the new signage will be in place by June 7 for a U2 concert.
– Dave Brooks

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