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Pizza Hut Park



Concert at Pizza Hut Park

photo provided by Pizza Hut Park

Entertainment at What Cost?

By Debbie Vallejo

THE ROARING CROWDS, the buzz of excitement, the endless amounts of food and beverages circulating through the stands...nothing beats the ageless American past time of “taking in a game.” If you live in or around Frisco “the game” comes in a variety of forms. Locals enjoy the excitement of baseball, hockey, soccer, or all of the above. And this summer marks the inaugural season of Frisco’s first indoor football team.

It’s no secret that Frisco has become the hot-spot for new development in

North Texas. The older residents of Frisco have watched area attractions pop up all around them, making Frisco a destination choice and a prime place to live. Some of the major selling points of the city are area attractions such as RoughRiders baseball, Texas Tornado hockey and FC Dallas soccer. With each of these teams comes a facility that provides family fun and entertainment, as well as jobs and tax revenue for the city. Surely there are some ancillary or secondary benefits to having a variety

of sports teams and complexes here in Frisco. How are the rather large facilities used in other ways besides taking in “the game?”

PURE ECONOMICS

One benefit of having several sports teams in the area is the fact that it attracts patrons from outside Frisco to come and spend their money here. Ed Reusch is vice president of the Dr Pepper StarCenter – Frisco. “Approximately 750,000 people walk through the doors

of this facility each year,” says Mr. Reusch. “Those people are eating lunch or dinner in Frisco restaurants and are shopping at local stores and malls.”

The Dr Pepper Ballpark, home of the Frisco RoughRiders, carries over 8,000 fixed seats, 27 suites and four party decks. The Ballpark was voted “Best New Ballpark in America” in 2003 by Ballpark Digest. Scott Sonju is general manager of the RoughRiders. “We draw in fans from the broader market, and many make a day of it and eat and shop while they’re here for a RoughRiders game,” explains Mr. Sonju. “The complex is first class and helps establish Frisco’s reputation of being a first class city. It’s something for all of us to take pride in.”

Pizza Hut Park, the venue for FC Dallas soccer, saw over 1.5 millions fans pass through its gates last year. Germàn Sferra is the director of media relations for FC Dallas and Pizza Hut Park. “People from over forty states and five countries purchased tickets to the past two MSL Cup Championship games, which were held here,” explains Mr. Sferra. “The concerts last summer also brought people to Frisco from all over the country.” Not only are people driving in from McKinney, they’re flying in from Japan, Holland, England and Germany. Not too shabby.

NOT JUST FOR THE GAME

Some teams form joint partnerships with the city and/or school district to build a plan that will benefit all involved. Pizza Hut Park, for example, was a joint venture between Frisco Independent School District, the City of Frisco, Collin County, Major League Soccer and Dallas-based Hunt Sports Group (HSG).

The facility itself is a testimony to the group’s foresight. The stadium seats over 21,000 and is accompanied by 17 fields for youth or adult soccer events. Local area schools have access to the fields and stadium. The stadium is made for multi-purpose use so it is also available for major concerts, high school football games, festivals and other community events. There are luxury suites and a 6,000 square foot Stadium Club where members enjoy additional amenities. Dr. Pink Field and the FC Dallas training field are located closest to the stadium. Dr. Pink Field is used exclusively by Frisco

ISD athletics and holds up to 600 people in the stands. The goal is for complex use to hit over 300 days per year, including concerts, high school football games, international soccer matches, national games, World Cup qualifiers, all-star games and amateur events. Community events will include local festivals, camps, clinics and tournaments.

The RoughRiders hold high school and college baseball tournaments as well as an occasional civic event at the Ballpark. They also provide the Ballpark for Prestonwood Baptist Church’s Easter Sunrise Service each year. “These events are not money makers,” explains Mr. Sonju. “They are an added value to our partners and the community... in fact, there are a lot of expenses involved, so we actually lose money. It would be cheaper for us to shut down the Ballpark, but we want it to be an asset for the community and our partners.”

We have hosted a number of events in the Deja Blue arena, international basketball exhibitions, Ultimate Fighting Matches & competitive tennis exhibitions.

The Dr Pepper StarCenter actually contains two ice rinks. The Stars rink is where, obviously, the Dallas Stars practice. The other, Deja Blue Arena, is where the Texas Tornado team plays. The Tornado season ends before the summer, so things get a bit slower between the months of May through August. This summer the facility is hosting the new indoor Frisco football team, the Frisco Thunder of the Intense Football League (IFL). Their season runs through the summer months so the facility will see plenty of use year round. Like the other two franchise team facilities, the StarCenter was designed with a variety of utilities in mind. “We have hosted a number of events in the Deja Blue arena,”

says Mr. Reusch. “These events include international basketball exhibitions, Ultimate Fighting Matches and competitive tennis exhibitions featuring top caliber athletes like Andy Roddick, James Blake and Anna Kournikova.” The arena has also held gymnastics, figure skating, cheerleading competitions, carnivals, pep rallies and children’s shows such as Blues Clues Live.

SPONSORSHIP COMMITMENT

Each team has corporate sponsors and sells marketing space as a way of drawing in important revenue for the franchise. The off-season is considered the prime time for securing new corporate sponsors and maintaining old ones. “We line up a handful of new corporate sponsors in the off-season,” explains Mr. Sonju. “Plus, we make our ballpark available to our sponsors, suite holders and Founder’s members, so there are many smaller events throughout the year.” Businesses taking part in sponsorship opportunities contribute to the overall operating budget of the team, but also get perks to go along with the expenditures. The RoughRiders keep their number of sponsors fairly low (they currently have 30), because the team creates custom promotions for each of its business partners. “It’s tough to educate your fans on hundreds of partners’ goods and services,” says Mr. Sonju.

Another important marketing tool is the players themselves. Teams practice at different times throughout the season and each franchise provides opportunities for fans to take in some of the practice sessions. “They practice every game day,” says Mr. Sonju of the RoughRiders players. “Batting practice is still going on when the gates open, so fans coming to the game can catch some of it.” Baseball players also sign autographs before every home game at the main entrance. The Stars practice every day they are not on the road. Their practice schedule is posted online and fans are allowed to watch practice at any time during the season before playoffs.

In addition to thinking of ways to draw people in, the teams also go out into the community with their marketing strategy. The RoughRiders marketing team is constantly out at school events, parades, business functions and openings,



FC Dallas games.” The Dallas Business Journal recognized Pizza Hut Park as the recipient of the Community Impact Award in 2006.

The Texas Tornado players take part in local community events and programs. The Community Organization of the Night is designed to create support for local non-profit organizations. One not-for-profit organization is featured at each home game throughout the season, bringing awareness to the community through a 15-second public service announcement, a kiosk display and acknowledgment on the scoreboard. The team is also heavily involved in local schools through its school programs such as Read to Achieve, student Honor Roll and Teacher Appreciation Awards.

carnivals and charitable events. “You’ll see our mascot, Deuce, out every week,” says Mr. Sonju. “We want the community to know we fully support this area and want to see it thrive. We want the area to know that we are a trusted teammate and we put together top-notch family entertainment.”

WORK ANYONE?

Local franchise teams also bring jobs to the area. Most of the employees live close by, and there are plenty of summer jobs for teenagers looking to make some extra cash. “Most of our staff live in Frisco,” explains Mr. Sonju. “And we provide many summer jobs for area youth. How great is that, to get to work at a beautiful ballpark!”

For an FC Dallas soccer game or a special event at Pizza Hut Park, additional manpower is utilized to take care of game day needs. “There are 85 full time employees for FC Dallas and Pizza Hut Park,” explains Mr. Sferra. “For an FC Dallas or Park event, up to 500 hourly employees may be brought in.”

IT’S JUST NOT A GAME WITHOUT THE FOOD

Concessions are actually such a bear to run and manage that many facilities,

including the Dr Pepper StarCenter, contract out their concession duties to outside companies. Those that choose to keep the business in-house don’t make as much money from food service as one might think. The RoughRiders carry the burden of managing their own concessions and the resulting revenue takes a distant third to ticket sales and corporate sponsorships. Even so, the RoughRiders have one of the largest expense budgets in the league and feel they are able to maintain a beautiful facility and offer first class service to fans. The easy access to food is a huge attraction for families in addition to the full ambience of taking in a game. In one night the RoughRiders will disperse an average of 5,000 hotdogs, 1,000 gallons of Dr. Pepper (no Coke here) and 2,000 Dippin Dots souvenir cups.

GIVING BACK

All three venues provide access to the facility for charitable events or give generously to community outreach programs. “FC Dallas launched a foundation in 2007 which serves as the charitable arm for FC Dallas and Pizza Hut Park,” says Mr. Sferra. “We’ve hosted numerous events that allow underprivileged kids in the metroplex to attend

and Teacher Appreciation Awards. The RoughRiders also take involvement in the community seriously. In addition to its own foundation, the team grants charitable donations to organizations, provides resources for educators and a Kids Night Out for underprivileged children who don’t usually attend. “We have a whole collection of letters we’ve received, from the numerous things we’re involved with, on a bulletin board in the office,” says Mr. Sonju. “I want all of our staff to know what an impact we’re having in the community and in people’s lives. It’s not just about baseball.”

The benefits to the local community become obvious when one looks at the various teams in the area and their contributions. Local jobs, additional tax revenue, family fun, community donations and programs all demonstrate how the companies have become excellent corporate citizens and care about the area. As the facilities are used in different ways, more opportunities are created for locals to make money and participate in fun activities – definitely some excellent ancillary benefits.

Debbie Vallejo is a freelance writer living in Frisco.