

*Expansion of the Dr Pepper StarCenter
photo by Chris Fritchie*



Expanding to Meet Changing Needs

By Suzanne L. Feinberg

FRISCO'S Dr Pepper StarCenter, which serves as the Dallas Stars' flagship practice facility, is undergoing a \$36 million expansion that will benefit sports fans, concert goers and the Frisco Independent School District (FISD) alike.

Hicks Sports Group, the company that manages operations and oversees maintenance of the Dr Pepper StarCenter, was looking to expand the facility to attract more concerts and events, while

the Frisco ISD had been contemplating building an arena to host high school graduation ceremonies.

As a result, Hicks Sports Group and the City of Frisco, who owns the property and facilities, agreed to a \$23 million expansion of the Deja Blue Arena within the Dr Pepper StarCenter complex. The agreement extends the terms of the Dallas Stars' lease of the building, ensuring ice hockey and the Dr Pepper

brand will be a fixture at the facility for at least 25 more years.

The 3,700-seat Deja Blue Arena also has been home to the North American Hockey League's Texas Tornado junior hockey team for the last three years. Most recently, the Intense Football League's Frisco Thunder began its inaugural season in the Deja Blue Arena in 2007.

According to initial plans drawn up by Dallas-based architect HKS Partners, the expansion of the Deja Blue Arena will boost seating capacity to approximately 5,100 for arena football, 6,100 for hockey games and close to 7,000 for concerts and graduations.

"Currently, we must use facilities outside the city for graduations, so we are very excited that our high school graduations will be held in this facility," says Ron Patterson, assistant city manager for the City of Frisco.

Additional retractable seating, concert-quality acoustics and enhancements of the arena's stage, promenade and luxury suites are planned. An upgraded concourse will feature better concessions and areas for merchandise sales. A state-of-the-art high definition video board will replace the existing center-hanging scoreboard and digital ribbon boards around the arena will be used to display team statistics and sponsor messages.

The deal also includes the construction of a new 1,000-space parking garage at a cost of \$13 million. The Classic BMW Parking Garage will be located near the Dallas North Tollway and will be used not only by patrons of the expanded Dr Pepper StarCenter, but also by fans attending Frisco RoughRiders games.

In addition to drawing several thousand people to hockey and indoor football games, the Deja Blue Arena occasionally hosts specialized events like tennis tournaments and basketball games that have proven to be successful. The expansion of the arena creates the potential to boost the caliber of events and to lure teams from other sports, including the National Basketball Development League of the National Basketball Association (NBA), according

to Jason Rademan, communications director for the Dallas Stars.

As the facility manager, Hicks Sports Group is responsible for booking entertainment at the venue. The additional seating and stage enhancements open the door to a variety of concerts and entertainment, much like the NOKIA Theatre in Grand Prairie.

“The City of Frisco has several major sports facilities which also host a variety of outdoor events. Expansion of this facility will allow us to draw major indoor events in addition to our outdoor venues,” says Mr. Patterson.

The project is part of the Hicks Sports Group’s larger plan to develop Champions Park, the entire area encompassing the Dr Pepper StarCenter, the Dr Pepper Ballpark, the Frisco Convention Center and Embassy Suites Hotel.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

“The expansion of the Dr Pepper StarCenter will provide for greater flexibility in the types of events that will come to Frisco, which results in additional economic impact for the City of Frisco,” says Marla Roe, executive director of the Frisco Convention and Visitors Bureau. “Both Texas Tornado and Frisco Thunder enhance the offerings we have when promoting Frisco as a tourism destination.”

The City of Frisco is funding the \$36 million project with bonds issued through the tax increment reinvestment zone (TIRZ). Revenue from the TIRZ and Hicks Sports Group’s annual lease payments, which will increase from \$716,800 to \$1.2 million, will be applied to the debt, so the project will not affect taxpayers’ pockets. In addition, Hicks Sports Group will cover any costs above and beyond the \$36 million budget.



Dr Pepper StarCenter arena interior construction

photo by Chris Fritchie

“Growth equals success and in Frisco we have seen a lot of both. We are very excited about the expansion of the Dr Pepper StarCenter,” said Jim Gandy, president, Frisco Economic Development Corporation. “Due to our rapidly growing community, the expansion will provide much needed venue space, as well as enhance the sports-friendly business climate we have here in Frisco.”

WHEN ICE HOCKEY CAUGHT FIRE IN NORTH TEXAS

Everyone knows North Texas is traditionally football country. However, the popularity of ice hockey has skyrocketed in recent years and the Dallas Stars like to think they have played a role in the growth of the sport.

The eight area Dr Pepper StarCenters are run by a department within the Dallas Stars organization and are used to conduct youth and men’s hockey leagues, skating classes and practices for local high school teams. Travel teams organized by the Dr

Pepper StarCenters compete at every level and the Frisco location has hosted several youth hockey tournaments. The expansion also means Frisco ISD’s hockey teams will have a new home to practice.

“The Dallas Stars’ community involvement helps grow the game and cultivate future fans and customers,” says Mr. Rademan.

When the team moved to the area from Minnesota in 1993, the Metroplex had only three ice rinks and two of them were in shopping malls. Only about 200 children were playing ice hockey and there were no high school ice hockey teams.

Today, 6,000 children and 72 high school teams enjoy the sport. Many learned to play

on a sheet of ice maintained by the Dallas Stars. A ninth Dr Pepper StarCenter with two sheets of ice is being planned for Craig Ranch in McKinney.

“We’re proud that of the other so-called Sunbelt teams in the National Hockey League, the Dallas Stars are the torchbearers,” says Mr. Rademan.

The Dallas Stars moved the team’s business functions, executives and corporate facilities from Valley Ranch to the Frisco Dr Pepper StarCenter in 2003. Almost all of the team’s practices, which are open to the public, are held at the practice facility within the complex.

Although the Texas Tornado has ceased operations for the duration of the renovation, half of the Dr Pepper StarCenter will remain open while the other half is under construction. The anticipated completion date is June 2009, just in time for graduation season.

Suzanne Feinberg is a freelance writer living in Frisco.