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Convention South

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The South's **GRANDEST VENUES**

INSIDE:

Sports Events:
A Growing
Market Segment

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Tradeshow*
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Destinations Score **BIG WINS** With Sports

Big Cedar Lodge's
Top of the Rock Golf Course
in Ridgedale, Mo.

No End In Sight For Market Growth & Opportunities

By Selena Chavis

Here's a big number: \$9.45 billion. That's the estimated visitor spending associated with U.S. sports events in 2015, according to a 2016 state of the industry report from the National Association of Sports Commissions. Up from an estimated \$8.96 billion in 2014 and \$7.68 billion in 2011, the number reflects steady year-over-year growth that industry professionals believe will continue for some time.

How Can Facilities Better Accommodate Sports Events?

Industry Professionals Weigh In:

“Partnerships are the most important part of any business. It’s imperative to communicate needs to one another to make sure everyone’s goals are met. When facilities are considering changes, expansions and improvements, it is also important to look at existing events and their needs while considering potential events. We like to take care of the business already in our community and then look outwards towards other potential events.”

— *Beth Gendler, Vice President of Sales, Gulf Shores and Orange Beach Sports Commission*

“If a group has not hosted before, the facility needs to understand the core essentials to success well in advance. We find it helpful to assign a research-minded service manager to every group. It is their job to understand what is vital to the success of the event. From things as simple as directional signage to participant registration to group assigned concierge services, it is the intensive discovery of needs that helps us accommodate and successfully achieve our sports events.”

— *Jason Robinson, Director of Marketing, Big Cedar Lodge and Big Cypress Lodge*

“We could always use more fields and we are always working on easier and more efficient ways to communicate with the facilities and with our participants when needed.”

— *Scott Mobley, Baseball State Director, United States Specialty Sports Association*

Drawing Big-League Events

The NCAA recently announced that the city of Fort Worth will host the 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 Women’s Gymnastics National Championship and the 2022 Division I Men’s Basketball Rounds 1 and 2. The announcement was made on the same day the city announced the new Dickies Arena, a 14,000-seat multipurpose venue, underscoring the influence of facilities on sports events.

In tandem with venues such as the Dickies Arena, Florida-based Lakeland Center recently rebranded itself as the RP Funding Center after signing a multi-year alliance formed by RP Funding, a Robert Palmer Company, the City of Lakeland and the Lakeland Magic (NBA D-League). RP Funding will receive exterior and interior building signage, and television, radio, print and social media promotion, while the naming-rights agreement will generate additional revenue toward the operation and maintenance of the facility. The facility is currently undergoing a \$14 million planned renovation project.

Scott Sloman, assistant director of the RP Funding Center, noted that the alliance is a win-win for the building, city and organizational patrons. “We’ve got two very viable and established entities working on our behalf,” he

said, citing the NBA and Robert Palmer Company. “Our building is now affiliated with an entity like the NBA, which raises the level of expectation for all of us. It’s going to improve our game, which in turn improves the service to our clients.”

Upgrades and new facilities are important to any infrastructure, although sometimes the right venue is off the beaten path, especially for non-traditional sports, said Jason Robinson, director of marketing for Big Cedar Lodge in Ridgedale, Mo., and Big Cypress Lodge in Memphis, Tenn. “Between Big Cypress Lodge and Big Cedar Lodge, you will see sports events well beyond what people traditionally think of when picturing sports events groups,” he said. “Our properties have hosted national bowfishing events, been a part of city-wide marathons and even hosted an annual PGA Tour Champions event, the Bass Pro Shops Legends of Golf at Big Cedar Lodge.”

Robinson noted that Big Cypress Lodge was a former NBA arena, home to the Memphis Grizzlies. That arena is now situated inside of a sprawling facility that is primed for hosting events. “We have large-scale parking available, an ideal location within the city and many resources around us to help pull off great events,” Robinson said. ■

