

## MAC touts first-quarter performance

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**By Phil Rooney**

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Ninety-six events have graced the Mid-America Center's arena and convention center since the start of the year.

Those past three months have included five family shows, 18 sporting events, one concert, 34 meetings and conventions, 15 consumer shows, 15 banquets, two trade shows and one assembly.

"We've had a great year, and it's magnified by the first quarter," said Charlie Schilling, the MAC's general manager. "We are always chasing the next event, and when you look back, our efforts are adding up."

The first quarter was slow for concerts, with the March 22 Evanescence show the only concert so far this calendar year. That part of the business picks up a little this quarter with Tool booked for May 12 and Fall Out Boy the following night. Schilling said both shows are selling well, but is cautious about predicting future bookings, saying that some solid acts are hesitant to play in the market between two superstars.

Other events planned for the arena include Iowa Blackhawks Football, Victory Fighting and Lancers Hockey. The number of playoff games the Lancers play depends on how well they play, Schilling pointed out, and that will make a difference in how much business the MAC does in the quarter.

Schilling has pointed out that Convention Center activities are sometimes overlooked, because many aren't open to the public. Recent events there have included the Callahan Craft Show, River City Hunting and Fishing Show and the Great Train Expo. Each drew more than 6,000 attendees. Peel's Salon Services Spring Trade Show hosted more than 3,000 professionals from the region.

The Omaha Bridal Network's Bridal Show and the Council Bluffs Home Improvement show each brought in more than 2,000 people.

The Convention Center also hosted the Cox Communication Year-End Celebration with 850 people, the Muscular Dystrophy Banquet and Nebraska Nursery & Landscaping Annual Meeting, each with more than 600 attendees.

CBSHOME Real Estate had more than 500 in attendance at a banquet and the Omaha Federation of Advertising's "Meet the Pros" had more than 400. More than 350 people attended Alegent Health Leadership Development.

Future events include proms, graduations and wedding receptions, plus The Daily Nonpareil Toast and Roast Banquet, Luis Palau Heartland Festival Women's Luncheon and the Heartland Floral Convention, and the 2007 Omaha Press Club Show, which will return to a dinner theater format at the MAC.

"It is a flattering opportunity for us to showcase what is a local tradition in our venue," Schilling said. "We're privileged to host it."

An outdoor show has been added to the annual calendar, with the Summer Antique Market set for July 29, rain or shine. The outdoor market will feature an array of quality antiques and authentic Iowa foods.

As the MAC moves into the final quarter of the fiscal year, Schilling said the arena has a \$59,000 profit while the Convention Center has a \$255,000 deficit. There have been 752 event days, that includes bookings for events that run multiple days and includes days when more than one event has taken place at the MAC this year.

The Mid-America Center finished last year with a \$434,000 deficit, a distinct improvement over its performance in prior years. Schilling said the MAC remains ahead of budget this year and he is looking for a figure similar to last year's final number on June 30.

The Mid-America Center has decreased its annual losses during the last three years. In 2004, the center's loss was \$530,000. That was followed by a \$505,000 loss in 2005 before last year's marked improvement.

Schilling has said other Iowa facilities have seen losses of \$800,000 to \$1.2 million, and venues such as the MAC often lose money but are valued for the business they attract to a community, such as filling hotel rooms and restaurants.

The City Council on March 13 approved a five-year extension of the management contract with SMG, Schilling's employer. That contract had been set to expire June 30.

The new contract included some changes and incentives:

- The management fee was reduced from \$125,000 to \$110,000 annually.
- SMG will be entitled to an incentive if it keeps annual operating losses below \$525,000.
- If the MAC sustains a net operating loss in excess of \$550,000 for two consecutive years, the city would have the right to terminate the agreement.
- If an entity would approach the city with an agreement to make a capital investment in the city of at least \$10 million and propose a management agreement to the city that is more favorable to the city and SMG does not agree to operate under the more favorable terms the city has the option of terminating the agreement.