

SMG, Huka Entertainment join Centre of Tallahassee



TaMarlyn Waters, Democrat staff writer 5:02 p.m. EST February 16, 2016



(Photo: Joe Randone/Democrat)

Two top companies in event and venue management are partnering with the Centre of Tallahassee mall.

On Tuesday, representatives were in town from SMG, a worldwide entertainment and convention venue management company, and Huka, North America's fastest growing event management company that deals mostly in destination event spaces.

The inclusion of SMG and Huka hints at major concerts, festivals and musical events that often skip Florida's capital. The Centre of Tallahassee, formerly Tallahassee Mall on North Monroe Street, is undergoing historic renovations to convert the mall into an indoor-outdoor facility with a covered 6,500 seat amphitheater,

restaurants and more.

"We're honored to have them here," said Alex Baker, developer and president of Blackwater Resources, which gained ownership of the 95-acre mall in 2013.

With 233 facilities under its management, SMG is the world's largest venue management company in the world, said Jim McCue, senior vice president of entertainment.

SMG operates stadiums, arenas, convention centers, amphitheaters and theaters. Venues include EverBank Field, home of the Jacksonville Jaguars, the Jacksonville Veterans Memoria Arena, a multi-purpose venue and the Pensacola Bay Center in Pensacola.

This is the first time SMG has managed a Tallahassee-based venue. SMG will oversee the mall's production, guest services, ticketing, sponsorship and marketing functions.

"We're very excited to be here," McCue said. "This is a fantastic opportunity for us and the Tallahassee community to have a brand new, state-of-the-art concert facility."

Dave Fortune, general manager of training at Huka Entertainment, said the company was drawn to Tallahassee because the city has a "compelling angle."

"This is an opportunity to be a part of the amphitheater," Fortune said, adding Tallahassee has the "perfect storm of opportunity."

The city has an under-served market for entertainment, Fortune noted. The amphitheater is covered and includes high-end sound and lighting elements that appeal to hot-ticket artist. He added support from local government is another plus.

Events envisioned at the mall's amphitheater include kids' shows, major music festivals and more. Huka produces two of the largest music festivals in North America — Tortuga Festival (Tortuga is Spanish for "turtle") in Fort Lauderdale in April and Pemberton Music Festival in Canada in July.

"This is perfectly built to have a broad array of different talent and groups to come to Tallahassee," Fortune said of the amphitheater.

Fortune, without giving confirmed details way, said such events may be in Tallahassee's near future.

"The quick answer is that when we're talking to these agents," Fortune said, "our hope is that we can give them options to take their artists from Tortuga and move them from that market to points north."

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