

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

La Crosse Center

Sales and Operation Audit conducted by Scott Chard of Conference Direct

May 11, 2019

The La Crosse Center commissioned and paid for a review of services provided by the La Crosse Center. Scott Chard of Conference Direct conducted the review. He conducted his review on April 9, 10 and 18, 2019. Chard's report touches on 10 "Sections" plus an organizational chart. We appreciated the report and the recommendations suggested as we strive to provide even better service to the guests who utilize and come to the facility.

We also recognize that many of his observations and suggestions arise out of being an older venue, lack of funding and of staff. A number of Chard's recommendations are already being addressed or are now in motion. Overall we appreciate the findings of his report and we thank Chard for his time and effort.

The report reaffirms not just the need to expand the La Crosse Center, but also to renovate and remodel the current building to give us a new, fresh look. It supports our decision to expand our sales and support staff, upgrade our website and social media presence to match the changing market, challenges us to work even better with our partners and strive even harder to meet and exceed our customers' expectation.

You will find that the report (**Section 1**) covers a "culture" in the market. Joint meetings between the LCCVB and LCC staffs have been conducted monthly as well as meetings between key LCCVB and LCC Board members and their respective directors. This communication has been very beneficial to ensure we are all working towards the same goal.

In the area of marketing and sales (**Section 2-3**) the LCC currently has a Request for Proposals out which addresses new branding, website, sales materials and more. This will address the ever changing way the public does business and obtains information. Also, the Center has restructured its sales so that there will be 2 designated sales staff. One focused on sales and event coordination and a second on sales and marketing efforts. One position is currently being interviewed for and the second will be filled as we move further into the expansion and construction project. Note that Chard referred to Simple View and that the LCCVB should have access to. Simple View is a software system that the LCCVB has for working with hotels to book rooms. This is software that does not deal with the LCC bookings. Separate software would be made available to the LCCVB. At the same time the LCC will need to maintain control because of factors such as turn over times and being able to provide enough equipment such as staging, screens, mics, podiums, pipe and drape, etc.

In (**Section 4**) the report he recognizes the heavy work load that the La Crosse Center staff takes on. Chard recommends adding staff for taking care of service standards. Funding for additional staffing will

be a key in being capable of making this happen. In order to make sure that the customers receive the greatest service possible and to save funds, we have cross trained many of our staff people to work in many areas.

There is a section **(Section 5)** that addresses catering. Currently, the LCC has open catering which means we have a list of caterers that have signed an agreement with the facility. The LCC receives a commission for the caterer's privilege to be at the LCC. This policy dates back many years when the City considered having an exclusive caterer. The feeling was that it is a city owned venue and should allow as many caterers who agreed to the terms. Currently there are 9 caterers which allow guests flexibility within their budgets. Chard is suggesting an exclusive caterer. The LCC however is a community based building and we have many fine caterers in the area. It has been the policy of the LCC and the City to provide the greatest opportunity for the public to benefit from this building. That includes allowing multiple caterers to use the facility and also allows the customer to have many choices. The LCC does do some catering as a revenue stream. On occasion the venue will do simple catering such as hors d'oeuvres and sandwiches and on other occasions there is a significant amount of catering handled by the LCC. This has allowed the facility to generate \$300,000 in 2018 gross catering revenue. This revenue allows the LCC to negotiate discounts when booking which results in filling hotel rooms.

On the topic of Audio Visual and Information Technology **(Section 6)** it seems we are not far apart on the current operations of the LCC. The Center has some inventory and allows outside companies to come in when there is a need. Chard is right on when it comes to this area being an ever changing and costly part of operations. Thus, allowing outsourcing is wise. A commission to the venue has been part of an earlier economic impact report with a similar suggestion which is being researched.

As part of the renovation of the building, many areas are being upgraded, such as all new seats in the arena. The expansion project also has within its budget new furniture and equipment **(Section 7)** as suggested in the Chard report. We all are looking forward to those additions.

Chard has suggested having building security on move in and move out days **(Section 8)**. This is not a bad suggestion although we think there would be push back from the clientele who would have to pay for this. On move in days many doors are open and it would take more than one security person to cover all outlets. This is a topic for the larger picture discussion.

The report also has suggestions on emergency procedures **(Section 9)**. The groups specifically pointed out in the report are religious, political and activists that have the potential for threats. When the venue has seen these types of events there has been added security measures.

A final recommendation **(Section 10)** is to have separate leadership of the arena and the convention center at the Center. This would mean a major coordination effort in booking and operating the venue. It would also be a significant investment in added staffing. There is a suggested organizational chart which appears to be adding some 6 or 7 staff members. That kind of staffing level would certainly affect the bottom line of the LCC. In the late 1990's the LCC was running in the red. At that time the City

Council and the Mayor directed the LCC Board and staff to deliver a positive bottom line. That has been accomplished for the past 18 years ***(See attached document Profit and Loss Numbers)***. The LCC doesn't measure its success on only the bottom line, but also with our customer feedback surveys ***(See attached document La Crosse Center Feedback Surveys)***, repeat business and the high level of occupancy the LCC has enjoyed.

We appreciate Chard's report and welcome his recommendations. With the La Crosse Center Board, LCC staff, the City of La Crosse and our key partners and teammates we welcome this review as we create a bigger and better La Crosse Center.