

Live from L.A.!

Simple concept begets grand result a decade later

By Cynthia E. Griffin
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It started with the Staples Center in 1999, and the aim was simple—revitalize and re-invigorate downtown Los Angeles and give the 25,000 people who live in the area as well as the 450,000 folks who work nearby new options when it comes to entertainment.

Over the next several weekends the second phase of the vision that AEG—a leading worldwide sports and entertainment presenter—worked with the City of Los Angeles to create, will come to pass.

Called L.A. Live, it is a \$2.5 billion, 4 million square foot entertainment, dining, sports and residential “campus” that will feature 12 restaurants, two clubs, one museum, one giant concert-type venue, one bowling center/lounge, one 14-screen movie theater complex and two world-renowned hotels.

The complex is projected to have a \$10 billion economic impact on the city including creating more than 25,000 jobs and generating \$18 million in new annual tax revenues once all elements are completed.

According to LA INC., the Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau, L.A. Live is already generating increased bookings for citywide conventions.

L.A. Live is an outdoor district with rich landscaping and wide sidewalks that invite pedestrian strolling. A number of venues have already opened including the Nokia Theatre, a 7,100-seat facility that opened in mid October and will host brand-name concerts and awards shows; Club Nokia, a club and concert spot that seats 2,300 and since opening Nov. 9 has already played host to such major acts as the B-52s, Usher, Nas, Sergio Mendez and Bone Thugs N Harmony; Lucky Strike a bowling center and lounge; the ESPN Zone, a two-floor restaurant and sports haven that contains giant television screens, a screening room, a studio grill sports arena and a small retail store. In April, the location will open the cable station’s West Coast broadcast studios; and finally, the New Zealand Natural Ice Cream shop will be one of the first such locations to open in America. Opening tonight is the Conga Room, which relocated from its long-time home on Wilshire Boulevard and La Brea Avenue to L.A. Live. Co-owned by Brad Gluckstein, Jimmy Smits, Jennifer Lopez, Paul Rodriguez and Sheila E., the club features pan-Latin cuisine, on site televisions and radio broadcast facilities, an architecture that combines contemporary elements from Mexico, Barcelona and the Caribbean, and it can accommodate 1,000 people.

On Saturday, the Grammy Museum opens to the public with interactive activities for would-be music stars, who can walk out of the building with their self-recorded song in an iPod.

Three more eateries will open prior to the Christmas holiday. These include Fleming’s Prime Steakhouse and Wine Bar, which is noted for its award-winning wine program that features 100 wines by the glass (Dec. 8); Lawry’s Carvery, a quick-serve restaurant with a fresh-cut deli menu (Dec. 15); The Farm of Beverly Hills, which offers American cuisine for breakfast, lunch and dinner, and features farm fresh ingredients, an indoor/outdoor fireplace in the bar and patio (Dec. 15); and finally on Dec. 21, the Yard House will open an upscale-casual dining spot known for carrying the world’s largest selection of draft beers.

In 2009, look for the addition of Rock ‘N Fish, a Southern California original serving steak and seafood; Katsuya with its offering of haute Japanese cuisine; Trader Vic’s; Wolfgang Puck Bar and Grill; and Rosa Mexicano.

Further down the road in phase three of the vision, visitors will be able to see movies at the 14-screen Regal Cinemas or reserve rooms in the JW Marriott Hotel, and live or reserve rooms in the Ritz Carlton Hotel and Residences.

Beyond the entertainment value L.A. Live offers Los Angeles residents, there is the economic infusion the project has brought to the city in terms of employment and business opportunities. According to AEG Vice President of Community Affairs, Martha Saucedo, by the time the second phase is completed, L.A. Live will employ more than 1,000 people and about 50 percent of those

are expected to come from within a three-mile radius of the entertainment district.

"Our human resources department is working with community-based organizations including the city's Work Source Centers to do a number of things," explained Saucedo about how the company is finding potential workers. "In some instances, we provide information about those (job) fairs, and the organizations will refer people."

In other instances, Saucedo said AEG will actually work directly with organizations to provide them with more detailed information on what they are looking for during interviews. And those people who are referred by the community organizations AEG partners with, will be able to take advantage of an expedited application process during job fairs.

In general, pay for jobs at L.A. Live fall in line with the City of Los Angeles' living wage, and Saucedo added that the majority of the employment opportunities are union positions.

In addition to pulling in potential employees from the immediate three-mile radius around the entertainment district, AEG is working with the city to target opportunities to the 72 zip codes that had an unemployment rate greater than 7% as of May 31, 2007. These include most of South Los Angeles, East Los Angeles, the Crenshaw district and areas of the San Fernando Valley.

According to Joe Hernandez, AEG director of supplier diversity, the company and city officials established a 30% local hiring goal, and have currently hired between 30% to 40% from the surrounding community.

In addition to hiring goals, Hernandez said there was also a goal to make sure that at least 25% of the subcontractors hired to help construct L.A. Live were companies owned by minorities and women.

"We've ranged between 30% and 10% (depending on the project) with an overall figure of just under 22%," added Hernandez.

Thor Construction is one of the biggest players in AEG's diversity effort. Described as the largest African American owned construction company in the nation specializing in site development, construction management, consulting, design building and general contracting, the Minnesota-based company is serving the dual function of working as a subcontractor on the Ritz Carlton and the Regal Cinemas, and of helping to bring in other underutilized subcontractors.

"We were contacted by AEG primarily because of our minority status and because of our work history in Las Vegas with high-end casino remodels. (That) brought us to their attention to do all the public areas of the Ritz Carlton," explained Steve Ramos, Thor Construction superintendent in charge of L.A. Live.

Ramos said Thor will do the concrete work on the bottom six floors of the Ritz and about 50% of the multi-million dollars in contracts will go to firms owned by minorities and women. Currently four companies, all of the Los Angeles area, have gotten contracts on the project, and added Ramos, they are looking for additional potential subcontractors. Interested firms should visit the Thor Web site.

Thor was founded in 1980 by Richard Copeland, who is currently president and chief executive officer of the company, and in June was elected president of the National Association of Minority contractors. The company was actually born because of an argument between Copeland and his father, for whom he was working at the time, the construction entrepreneur said in one published report.

"He fired me. He marched me out of the office right in front of everyone," explained Copeland, who had just gotten married and was expecting his first child. But that misfortune turned out to be very fortuitous because it put him in the position of looking for work at the time that a local electrical company was far behind on a job.

Copeland said he asked for a chance, and they gave it to him. Today, the business that started out with a rake, a shovel and an old pickup truck, a la "Sanford and Sons," is a \$200 million company with about 120 employees and offices in Minnesota, Atlanta, Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

US Metro Group Inc. is another minority-owned firm that is benefiting from doing business with L.A. Live.

"We provide total facility services—janitorial, maintenance and security," explained Lesia Davis, director of business development for the Los Angeles-based firm owned by Charles Kim.

Kim, who has been providing these services for more than 35 years, also has contracts in Arizona, Nevada, Washington, Oregon, Texas, Kentucky, New York and Hawaii.

And like Copeland, he started from humble origins—an immigrant working as a janitor. He started

the company and grew it to the point, that he now employs more than 6,000 people across the nation and offers his company services to office buildings, shopping centers, malls, banks and many more.

Davis said, it was the company's reputation for top-notch services that enabled US Metro Group to secure the L.A. Live contract.

From the venues selected to the contractors like Copeland and Kim working on the project, presenting Los Angeles residents with the best available is the goal of L.A. Live.

The public display of that begins tonight at 7 p.m. with a seven-minute, multi-media display called Light of the Angels. The show contains more than one million lights that will begin flashing at 7 p.m. and on the hour each night in conjunction with holiday music and more than 10,000 holiday images displayed on giant light boards. The display will also feature 50, 10-foot angels adorned with lights and attached to light posts throughout the district as well as a digital holiday tree sculpture that stands 54 feet above Nokia Plaza.

The idea for Light of the Angels, like L.A. Live, is really simple—AEG wants to create a new holiday tradition in Los Angeles.