



SBJ/Aug. 3-9/Facilities

Changes in premium mark remaking of Nassau arena

By **Don Muret**, Staff Writer

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After Billy Joel plays the last notes of Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum's final concert Tuesday, the arena will shut down for 15 months of construction. It will reopen after undergoing dramatic physical changes to its premium offerings, most notably a loge box retrofit, a major reduction in suites and the consolidation of two event-level restaurants into one high-end club.

It's all part of the effort by project developer Forest City Ratner Cos., the group privately funding the renovation, to transform the 43-year-old arena into a first-class concert venue with about 4,700 fewer seats. Downsizing from more than 17,000 seats to 13,000 should also make it more attractive for booking minor league, college and high school sports, said Brett Yormark, CEO of Barclays Center and the Brooklyn Nets, who is leading all operations tied to the Nassau Coliseum project.

The \$130 million arena refurb will dramatically remake the premium-seating options:

- Ten loge boxes, packaged in groups of four to six seats on small couches, will be built at the top of the lower bowl on the arena's south side, said Peter Wang, a design director with Gensler, the project architect.

Prices on the boxes will run from \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year and cover all events at the arena.

- The arena's 33 suites will be cut down to six, all in the south end facing the stage end for concerts. They'll have movable walls to provide flexibility for selling individual units or one large group space depending on the event.

One suite is reserved for the sponsor that buys the arena's naming rights. Officials expect to announce a deal



A new look on the outside will be just the start in Nassau.

Photo by: NASSAU EVENTS CENTER

in the next 30 days, Yormark said.

■ The new event-level club will be among the perks that are part of 500 season-ticket packages costing \$7,500 to \$10,000 a year and including all events. Those buyers get exclusive access to seats on the floor and the first few rows of the lower bowl. The renovation will replace all of the arena's seats, including some in the lower bowl that date to the building's opening in 1972.

The packages will go on sale in the first quarter of 2016. Nassau staff will book concerts and other events in-house and work with all promoters, Yormark said.

"We're positioning this building as a Long Island play," he said. "It's a huge market with large density [7.6 million residents] and significant demographics."

For smaller productions, a curtaining system will further reduce the arena's capacity to 4,000 to 6,000 seats. The building's interior walls will incorporate the same dark colors evident at Barclays Center, Wang said.

Hunt Construction, the same firm that erected Barclays Center, is rebuilding the facility.

Officials are adopting best practices from Barclays Center, including using Disney Institute's customer service training program to help hire Nassau staff. Levy Restaurants, Nassau's concessionaire, will develop a Taste of Long Island food and drink program similar to what it does with Taste of Brooklyn at Barclays Center. The Long Island region is known for its seafood, farm produce, breweries and wineries.

The project takes place after the New York Islanders, the arena's former tenant, relocated to Barclays Center to play their home games, starting this fall.

The first sports event at the renovated arena will be a University of Kentucky men's college basketball game in December 2016.

It will be followed by the Frozen Island, a college hockey doubleheader tentatively scheduled for January 2017, featuring teams from the Atlantic Hockey Association, Hockey East Association and the Eastern College Athletic Conference.

Nassau Events Center, the name under which Forest City Ratner is doing business on the project, partnered with promoter Play By Play Sports for that event.

"I grew up in that coliseum and understand the passion for hockey and college sports," said Tim Roth, Play By Play's senior vice president and a Long Island resident. "It's a perfect fit."

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