

Arena coalition could be alternative to management firm

By MAURY THOMPSON

thompson@poststar.com

Friday, November 23, 2007 5:40 PM EST

GLENS FALLS — Hiring a private management firm is not the only way for the Glens Falls Civic Center to gain leverage in booking concerts and events.

The Civic Center also could join a coalition of independent arenas that operates a coordinated booking and marketing effort, said Civic Center Executive Director Suzanna Bernd.

The 2008 proposed Civic Center budget includes \$9,500 to join Venue Coalition, an organization of about 30 arenas in small- and mid-sized markets in the United States and Canada.

Bernd said the city could recoup the membership fee with "one good concert."

Venue Coalition, with offices in Westlake Village, Calif., and Winnipeg, Canada, provides research, industry information and collective booking efforts for member arenas.

The coalition's staff regularly attends trade shows and has established relationships with promoters, Bernd said.

Promoters setting up concert and event tours need make only one contact to book dates at multiple arenas.

"It's like one-stop shopping for all those buildings, just like it would happen with a private management company," Bernd said.

The coalition, founded in 2005, has 30 facilities as members, ranging in size 4,500 to 23,000 seats, according to the coalition's Web site. Of the 30 facilities, 11 have 8,000 or less seats.

The Civic Center can seat anywhere from 4,800 to 7,800, depending on the event and stage arrangement.

The coalition holds conference calls on a regular basis in which arena managers can learn about new tours in works, what kind of deals other member arenas are getting and how artists are drawing in other markets, said Carey Harveycutter, who manages the 8,000-seat Salem Civic Center in Virginia, which joined the coalition this summer.

Membership has increased the arena's exposure, he said, because the coalition places full-page ads in industry journals, something the arena couldn't afford to do on its own.

With just a few month's experience, it would be difficult to identify any one event the arena landed specifically because of being part of the coalition, but membership certainly has helped, he said.

Coalitions of this type are typical in the tourism, convention and entertainment industries, said Glens Falls Mayor Roy Akins.

"Personal relationships are very beneficial," he said.

Joining the coalition is one of many options officials are considering for the Civic Center, along with the possibility of hiring a private management firm, Akins said.

Three private management firms -- Global Spectrum, SMG and VenuWorks -- recently made presentations to the city Common Council.

The coalition could be an alternative to hiring a private management firm, or it could be used to increase bookings in the interim period before a private management firm takes over, Bernd said.

The coalition would supplement her individual booking efforts, Bernd said.

"It doesn't in any way eliminate any of my work," she said.