# New curtain system makes Littlejohn concert venue once again

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

CLEMSON — The City of Clemson and Clemson University's agreement nearly two years ago to financially collaborate on the purchase of a new curtain system in order to make Littlejohn Coliseum a more viable concert destination appears to be paying dividends.

Marty Kern, director of major events for Clemson University and general manager of Littlejohn Coliseum, told Clemson City Council recently that the $384,000 curtain system — of which $100,000 was funded by the city and the remainder from the university — has enabled the coliseum to compete with other major venues in the area.

"We needed flexible configurations, improved acoustics, marketability and the ability to attract major events," Kern said.

When calculating the economic impact for fall concerts from the fall of 2008 to the fall of 2009, Kern said the total came to $175,910.

"With your $100,000 investment, we were able to yield pretty good results in a (economic) time that is difficult," she said.

Littlejohn Coliseum opened in 1968 and once served as a hotbed for major concerts during the 1970s and '80s. It hosted major recording artists such as Billy Joel, Boston, Kansas and Barry Manilow, and, in recent years, Bob Dylan and Hank Williams, Jr.

But Kern told city council in 2008 that the coliseum was focused more these days on attracting artists that can bring in anywhere between 4,000-6,000 fans and the lack of a curtain system hampered those efforts.

Kern said a floor to ceiling curtain system would allow for the creation of a showplace inside the arena, allowing the coliseum to "re-create itself" and compete with the Bi-Lo Center in Greenville, Colonial Center in Columbia and Time Warner Cable Arena in Charlotte that already have such a system. The return on such an investment, Kern pointed out, could be realized within two years.

Initial efforts by the city of Clemson and Clemson University to seek a South Carolina Competitive Grant to purchase a new curtain system proved unsuccessful. But Clemson University agreed to fund $300,000 through private donations and a loan while city council unanimously approved the funding of $100,000.

"As soon as we got the 'yes,' we rolled out in the fall of 2008 with six shows, including The Steve Miller Band," Kern said. "Basically, what we did was create a venue within a venue."

Although last fall proved to be somewhat slower, Kern said the coliseum hosted "Sesame Street Live," which drew more than 1,900 — with 61 traveling from Greenville and 89 from more than 100 miles. Kern said upcoming concerts from now through June 8 include Eric Church, NeedtoBreathe and Daughtry and that the curtain is also used for non-ticketed events such as Tiger Paw Gymnastics and Legends of the South, a cheer and dance competition to promote awareness of breast cancer.

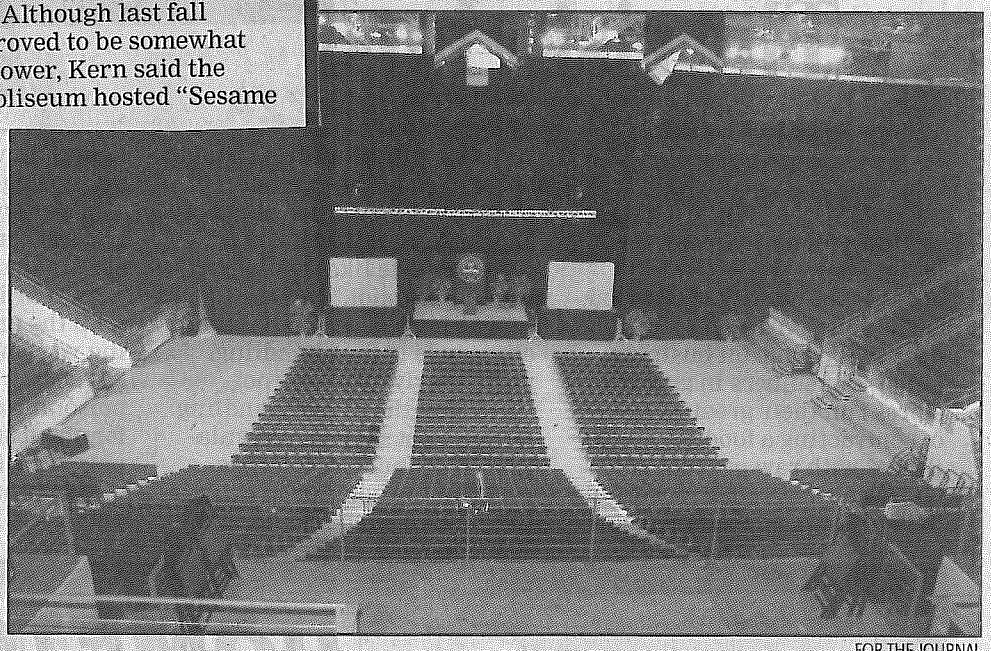
"We've got to book what's hot now and what's going to sell in this marketplace," Kern said. "Typically, less than 35 percent of our sales go to students and, considering that musical tastes vary, anytime we can get that percentage from 17,000 students, that's pretty good."

Clemson Mayor Larry Abernathy said the results were better than anticipated, especially considering the economic realities.

"The good news for us is that it puts heads in beds and people eat here when they attend these events," Abernathy said.

greg@dailyjm.com | (864) 882-2375

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**A $384,000 stage curtain, primarily funded by Clemson University with $100,000 from the City of Clemson, provides a more intimate setting for various concerts and events at Littlejohn Coliseum. It also allows the coliseum to compete with other major venues in bringing in various attractions.**