

Kosciusko County Event Center



Kosciusko Leadership Academy

Class of 2011

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Kosciusko Leadership Academy, class of 1992, completed a feasibility study and proposal to construct a convention and exhibition center in Kosciusko County. Almost 20 years later, the demand for such a building still exists in Kosciusko County. Since 1992 there has been interest by local community leaders and residents to explore the need for the convention/event center. To date, the proposals for the convention/event center have never made it to fruition. After exploring a variety of area convention centers in the Kosciusko area, the class of 2011 has determined that there is indeed still a need for a multi-purpose event center in Kosciusko County.

The Proposal/Need

After reading the proposal from the KLA class of 1992, reviewing the 2007 meeting minutes from the Convention/Event Center Ad Hoc Committee, attending the fairgrounds board meeting, and from years of hearing friends and relatives' stories of traveling out of town to attend wedding receptions, work parties, family reunions, etc., the KLA class of 2011 wants to re-open the discussion of the need for a multi-purpose event center. The goal of the new building is to be large enough to accommodate up to 600 people and allow potential clientele to create the type of atmosphere that will best suit their event. Current facilities in the Kosciusko area have limitations or rules that would force a customer to make the tough decision to either accept the facilities' restrictions or look for a facility out of town that would meet their needs. The goal of this new building would put the creativity back in the hands of the customer to allow them to hold the event as they see fit.

The Survey

A feasibility study was completed in February 2011 to determine what type of facility is needed in Kosciusko County. {See attachment A} A 19 question survey was distributed to approximately 20 community leaders in the Kosciusko County area. The survey posed questions to participants on current use of facilities offered in Kosciusko County, what months their events were held, the types of events held, the number of people who attend the events, and what types of amenities were most important when booking a location for an event.

A total of 84.2% of the respondents surveyed stated their organization has hosted a convention, special event or offsite seminar in the last 12 months. Of the 84.2% who hosted an event, 87.6% held multiple events ranging from 2-10+ events on a yearly basis.

Of the 20 respondents, 43.8% of those surveyed stated they held their most current event(s) at places other than the Orthopedic Center, 2517, Ramada, Center Lake Pavilion, Shrine Building, Oakwood, Westminster, and any other facility in Kosciusko County. An additional 18.8% of respondents that were surveyed indicated that they held their event in Northern Indiana. On an interesting note, 100% of those surveyed said they would consider Kosciusko County as a potential site for their next event. Having said this, if Kosciusko County had the facilities that would meet the needs of their customers, the revenue possibilities could increase significantly for the county. One area this team did not focus on was the amount of revenue businesses in Kosciusko County lost due to not having the ability to meet the needs of events that

were held out of county. Potential revenue for the county could be a paper in itself. The survey offered respondents the option to state why they held their event at a location other than what is offered in Kosciusko County, however, the respondents chose not to participate in that area of the survey.

The next area of the survey assessed what customers looked for in a facility when looking for a place to hold their event. When reviewing the data collected from the survey, the top five areas businesses and the general public feel are very important when looking for a building to hold their event(s) are as follows: Size of the Facility (85%), Audio/Visual Amenities (83.3%), Facility Amenities & Services (68.4%), Food Service (65%), and Internet Capabilities (64.7%).

The following questions of the survey assessed what types of events local organizations use event centers for. A majority of the respondents (56%) stated they would use an event center for banquets, followed by trainings/seminars (50%), customer appreciation events and employee meetings (37.5% each), and trade shows/exhibits, multi-day trainings/seminars and other events (25% each). While this survey was distributed to local community leaders, it does not capture what individual local community members would use this facility for. Through casual conversations with family members and friends in the community, most had traveled or know someone who traveled out of the county to an event due to Kosciusko County not having the ability to meet the needs of the event.

This next section of the survey results focused on what amenities were used when hosting an event. Most of the respondents surveyed, 87.5%, stated they use the Dining

Room/Food Service, closely followed by the use of a main meeting room (81.3%). Other amenities valued in a facility are as follows: stage/auditoriums-43.8%, classroom/seminar rooms-37.5%, overnight hotel accommodations and exhibition hall-25%, recreation and concessions-12.5%, and ballrooms/other-6.3%.

The size of the facility was definitely the most important quality in an event/convention center compared to cost. The data collected from the survey showed that most of the events held by local organizations have an attendance of anywhere from 50-300 people. Five respondents held events where there were less than 50 attendees, four respondents held events where they had 300-600 attendees, and three respondents held events for more than 600 people.

The event/convention center will need to have the ability to accommodate the different needs of the community when holding personal or company events, offering rooms to accommodate anywhere from 50-600 people at any given time. The proposed layout of the event center accommodates the areas deemed important by those surveyed and will be discussed later in the paper.

Current Locations

While the residents of Kosciusko County and their surrounding areas have a variety of facilities to rent in the county, each facility has limitations that hinder potential clientele from keeping their business within their community. When looking at size and amenities, 2517 holds up to 300 people. One of the stipulations with renting this facility is that the renter must use their caterer and bartender if they choose to serve food and alcohol at their event. This option doesn't work for customers who would prefer to serve

their own food and alcohol, host carry-ins, etc. The Shrine Building holds 285 people. If the renter plans to serve alcohol at their event, they must have a licensed bartender and pay for security, which is an additional \$25/hour in addition to the cost of renting the facility. Center Lake Pavilion holds up to 300 people and alcohol is not allowed. The Orthopedic Capital Center can hold up to 400 people at a cost of \$1875. Alcohol is not allowed at this facility and the renter must use the Orthopedic Capital Center's caterer unless the renter's caterer has a \$1,000,000 insurance policy.

The Vision

The 40,000 square foot event center was estimated to cost anywhere from \$3,600,000.00-\$5,800,000.00 as proposed by DJ Construction Company Inc. {Please see attachment B} The proposed cost is for a complete turn-key construction project. The proposed budget allows the building to be constructed with pre-engineered steel and masonry exterior walls. Interior walls would be constructed with steel studs. The proposed budget excludes the cost of land, audio/visual equipment, specialty lighting, and furnishings.

The design of the event center is the same building design created by Scarce and Associates Incorporated for the KLA class of 1992's white paper project. The size and design of the building would meet the needs of area consumers who participated in the feasibility study. Scarce and Associates Incorporated design is for a 30,000 square foot building. {Please see attachments C & D} After talking to a local banking manager who was part of the Ad Hoc Committee it was determined that a 40,000 square foot

building better meets the needs of the community. New architectural designs would need to be drafted for the additional square footage.

The 40,000 square foot building would need roughly 10 acres of land to accommodate the building, parking lot, sidewalks and landscaping. In the original building design there is an entry/display area, ticket booths, restrooms, coat closets and an office. This KLA team is proposing the additional 10,000 square feet be utilized for additional office space occupied by area businesses as a source of revenue.

The event center would feature a ballroom/convention hall in the center of the facility large enough to seat 600 banquet style or 900 theater style. The original design included folding walls to break the hall into two sections holding up to 300 banquet style or 450 theater style seats (according to research by the KLA class of 1992 on each side). The proposed 9,000 square foot room could also accommodate exhibition shows.

Along the corridors there will be two meeting rooms that could hold 100 people each. The meeting rooms will each be equipped with a line of folding walls to divide the conference room into two smaller 50 people or fewer rooms for multi-purpose use. The original design also incorporated outdoor meeting areas adjacent to each conference room. Depending on the site selected for this facility this may not be possible or needed.

Along the back of the building there is a storage and mechanical room. The original proposal accounted for a 3,000 square foot kitchen with all of the appropriate amenities to prepare and serve food. The kitchen area could be used for events where clients

would like to provide their own catering options such as hiring local restaurants and caterers or catering the event themselves.

The Location

The KLA team looked at four different locations where the Convention and Exhibit Center could be constructed requiring roughly 10 acres of land. The first (and preferred) location is located on SR 15 N corridor with 541' of frontage. The site is adjacent to the Lake City Bank branch, south of Da-Lite Screen Co Inc. The 9.52 acre lot is priced at \$1,950,000 and is zoned commercial. This area of town is highlighted as a growth area in Kosciusko County. {See attachment E}

The second location is land to the east of SR 15 located on 250N. There are two areas of land located on 250N owned by the Board of Aviation Commission of the City of Warsaw that would meet the needs of the Kosciusko County Event Center. While this land is currently not for sale the proprietors could request to lease the land from the Commission.

The third location that was assessed was property along US 30 located at 2329 N. 200 W. {See attachment E} The light industrial zoned area is considered a high growth area with high visibility. All utilities are available in this high traffic count area. There are 35 acres of land available costing \$35,000 an acre. Estimating that the building project will need 10 acres of land, the total cost of land for this project is estimated at \$350,000, if the seller is willing to sell the land in smaller parcels. Or the additional land could be used for further expansion of a Hotel attached by a corridor/breezeway.

The fourth location is at the 4H County Fairgrounds constructed near Winona Lake. The KLA team of 2011 met with the 4H Fair board and determined that the fairgrounds would be a nice location for the Event Center because the property would more than accommodate a 40,000 square foot building with parking while providing a beautiful view of Winona Lake. The purchase and cost of land has not been discussed with the fairgrounds.

Revenue Opportunities

The KLA team of 2011 has sent letters and pledge forms to local business leaders in the community explaining the proposal for a convention/event center in Kosciusko County. The pledge forms ask community leaders for a commitment to pledge funds towards the construction of the Convention and Exhibit Center. {See attachments G, H and I} Pledge forms were emailed to the 20 community leaders and organizations that were surveyed in the Kosciusko County area, resulting in the return of one pledge form from a private individual.

Facilitating fundraising through a Capital Campaign and grants are also sources of generating revenue to see the building through to fruition. Another possibility would be to find a private investor willing to donate funds to build the facility and in return the building could be named after them. Asking area businesses to donate time, supplies and money in exchange for marketing opportunities is also another avenue that can be explored. Some marketing opportunities for businesses that donate in these ways could result in recognition for their generosity through appreciation plaques located in the

entryway of the facility, business names stamped in concrete or business names etched in a marble statue, to name a few.

Rental of the facility, equipment and technology amenities will be a source of revenue to sustain the financial viability of the new structure. As mentioned earlier, the original design of the Convention and Exhibit Center is a total of 30,000 square feet. This KLA team proposes an additional 10,000 square feet be added to the original square footage total to provide office space for area businesses to rent. This office space could help sustain the revenue needed to support the event event. The Chamber of Commerce, Builders Association Kosciusko Fulton Counties Inc., Board of Realtors, and the Visitor's Bureau are some suggested area businesses that could occupy the office spaces.

As suggested by the KLA class of 1992, Kosciusko County could also consider implementing a Food and Beverage Consumption Tax and allocating a certain percentage of the funds raised through the tax for the Event Center. {See attachment J} Lastly, the county can look at a tax-free bond issue. Bonds are one of the safest investment vehicles. The principal or face value of the bond is paid on a maturity date with interest paid once or twice a year. Municipal bonds, or munis, provide tax-free interest, which makes an attractive investment for people in higher tax brackets.

Conclusion

Twenty years of discussion concerning the development and implementation of an Event Center has resulted in 20 years of lost revenue for Kosciusko County. It is time for the community leaders of Kosciusko County to step up and take charge of this

project to see it through to completion. It is time to listen and react to the community's desire for a facility that can accommodate the various needs each person and organization has. The local facilities in this community have limitations that force potential customers to look for locations to hold events outside of the county. With all of the beautiful attractions this county has to offer, there is no reason why Kosciusko County cannot construct a profitable, functional and popular multi-purpose event center.

It is the recommendation of this KLA team for the community leaders of Kosciusko County to ensure the event center is constructed and for the Visitor's Bureau to be responsible for ensuring the event center remains fiscally sound for many years to come by operating the facility. In conclusion, if this white paper is selected as the winning team for the highly honored Northenor Award we would use the funds to have architectural prints drawn and start the capital campaign. It has truly been our pleasure to be part of the Kosciusko Leadership Academy program; it has educated, enriched, inspired and challenged us to make a difference in the lives that follow...Leave a Legacy!