

Photos supplied by 360 Architecture.



With its architectural innovation, the dazzling Stockton Arena sets a new standard for mid-sized arenas in the U.S.

## Stockton Arena sets new standard for mid-sized venues

### Recent opening unveils architectural innovation, fan friendly design

Until very recently, the city of Stockton was one of California's best-kept secrets.

But as of Dec. 10, Stockton, a fast-growing waterfront city of 260,000 located about 80 miles east of San Francisco, could no longer stay under the radar. Which is exactly what the city had in mind when it planned the Stockton Arena, the city's dazzling new 10,000-seat, \$68 million multi-purpose sports and entertainment venue that sits nestled along the San Joaquin Delta Waterway. Chicago-based International Facilities Group (IFG) served as the city's consultant for the project and will operate the Arena.

When the ECHL Stockton Thunder hit the ice for its season-opener on Dec. 10 against the Phoenix Roadrunners, it marked the official unveiling of the 247,000 square-foot Arena, an architectural gem, designed by 360 Architecture

of Kansas City, Mo., that offers design elements not seen before in an arena of any size. Besides the Stockton Thunder, the second anchor tenant for the Arena will be the Stockton Lightning, an af2 Arena football team. The Arena also will be the home floor for the MISL California Cougars in 2006.

Entertainment-wise, the Stockton Arena expects to host a variety of major musical performers and events, many of which previously played only the larger arenas in neighboring cities of San Jose, Sacramento and San Francisco. Events planned for the Stockton Arena include the circus, music concerts, exhibitions (basketball, tennis, etc.), family performances, festivals, graduations, high school sports, ice shows, NCAA sports, stage shows, trade shows and professional wrestling.

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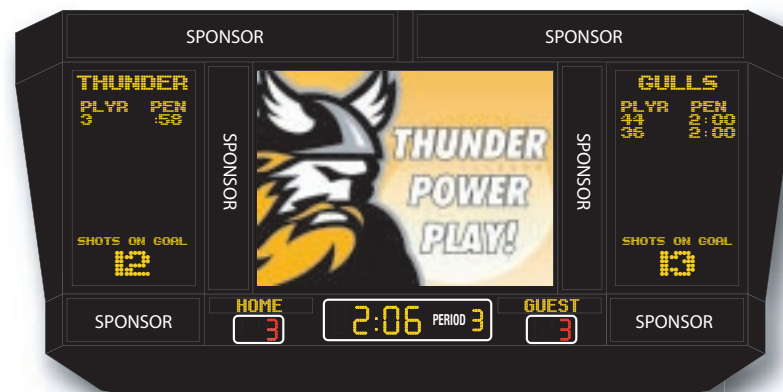
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Stockton Arena luxury suites are on par with any venue, large or mid-sized, and offer intimate views of the ice.

Key amenities in the progressively designed Arena include 24 luxury suites, 344 premium club seats, 5,000 square feet of meeting rooms and administrative offices for all the sports teams and the arena operations and management staff.

Financed entirely by the city of Stockton, the Arena serves as the crown jewel of the Banner Island mixed-use waterfront development, collectively called the Stockton Events Center. Apart from the Arena, the Stockton Events Center includes a 5,000-seat ballpark (home of the Stockton Ports, a popular minor league baseball team), with plans to add a 150-room conference hotel, 45,000 square feet of retail space, and a seven-level, 600-car parking garage.

"The Stockton Arena is the defining venue of the Stockton Events Center, forever chang-

ing the skyline of a City with a rich past and a tremendous future," says Stockton Mayor Edward Chavez.

IFG, a leader in development and management services for municipalities and professional sports owners, oversaw the Arena's development, design and construction, and provided the hockey and football tenants. IFG also will manage the Arena for the city of Stockton, as well as a number of other facilities in Stockton, including the newly renovated 2,000-seat Bob Hope Theater, and the city's public ice skating rink.

"This project is an example of IFG's role being maximized. The city looked to us as their expert. We had major input with all the important decisions affecting programming, design, construction, facility management and team ownership," says Michael Reinsdorf, managing

member of IFG. "IFG principals committing to the teams/leases was also a critical factor in the city's decision to fund the Arena."

Reinsdorf, along with partners Steven Edelson and Terry Savarise, founded IFG in 1995, and in 10 years the company has been part of several major sports facility projects, including: U.S. Cellular Field (Chicago), Comerica Park (Detroit), Miller Park (Milwaukee), Great American Ball Park (Cincinnati), SBC Center (San Antonio), American Airlines Arena (Miami), Conseco Fieldhouse (Indianapolis), Toyota Center (Houston) and many others.

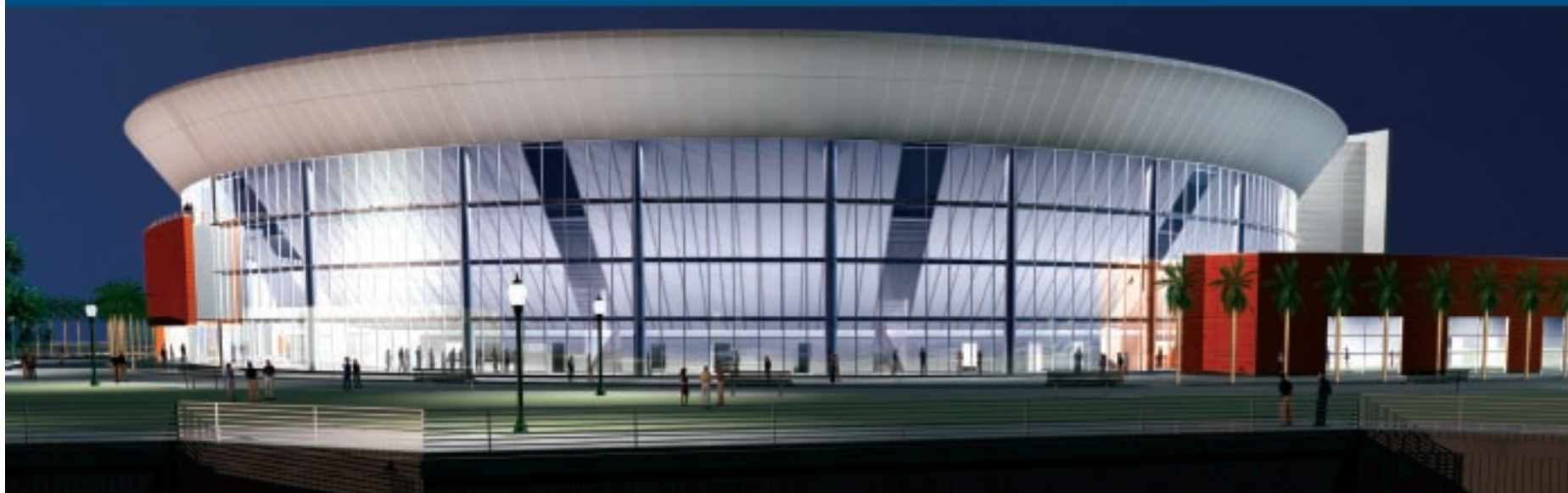
"This type of sports and entertainment venue really complements the region's growth," says Kevin Greene, IFG senior vice president of design and construction, who has been involved in over a dozen new major

sports facility projects, including Invesco Field at Mile High, Save Mart Center and Glendale Arena. "The Arena is the beacon of this waterfront redevelopment, marking a major year round destination that truly is a model for other markets."

To make the project a success, both in terms of design and ongoing management, IFG partnered with three of the top firms in sports architecture, food and beverage concessions, and video display technology respectively – 360 Architecture, Delaware North Sportservice, Buffalo, NY, and Daktronics, Brookings, SD.

"Daktronics is one of the best in the business," says IFG's Greene. "For the Stockton Arena, we have same high-resolution scoreboard that is sitting in Glendale Arena for the NHL Coyotes."

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"The Arena is really getting a great 'super system' that incorporates many different displays and capabilities," says Nate Fossell, Daktronics project manager. "The center-hung scoreboard is a unique design with four great ProStar video displays and eight additional LED displays to keep hockey, arena football and soccer fans up to speed. The system we designed and built needed to have a lot of versatility for all the different events that will be held here."

IFG's Jim Rodems, the Arena's general manager, had very high praise for both Daktronics and Sportservice. The latter provides food, beverage, fine dining/catering and retail operations for many of the top professional sports teams (NHL, NBA, MLB) and arenas in the U.S., including the American Airlines Center (Dallas), the TD BankNorth Garden (Boston), the HSBC Arena (Buffalo), Nationwide Arena (Columbus) and the St. Pete Times Forum (Tampa).

"I can't speak enough about how great it has been to work with Sportservice," says Rodems, who joined IFG specifically to manage the Stockton Arena. "The menus are outstanding, and they rank with the larger stadiums and arenas."

Rodems notes that Stockton sits smack in the middle of one of the world's largest agricultural areas, a fact not lost on Sportservice when it comes to access (and low cost) of locally grown produce.

"Sportservice is running with that, and, as a result, we are seeing a much better offering/menu for our concessions and suite catering," Rodems says.

"We're definitely serving fried asparagus," says Sportservice President Rick Abramson, alluding to a local favorite dish (Stockton has held an annual Asparagus Festival every spring for the past 20 years).

Abramson says that while the Stockton Arena is one of the most impressive multi-use arenas he has seen regardless of size, the building represents something well beyond an isolated project.

"From our standpoint, it's much more than just a one-off, beautiful facility," he says. It's a very strong sign of our excellent relationship with IFG and the Reinsdorf family [owners of the White Sox and the NBA Bulls] in general. It has been a pleasure working with them over the years [Sportservice has had the Chicago

White Sox as clients since 1959], and Michael is great to work with."

Abramson says Sportservice looks forward to continue building its relationship with IFG, with the hopes the Stockton Arena partnership will carry over to other similar projects.

"When you look at the scope of this project, I don't know if anyone has ever done anything like IFG has done here," he says. "Looking at IFG's promising future, this can be a great springboard into more of the same."

Abramson is echoing the Delaware North Sportservice long-time business style, as the company's founders created a unique history (and their successful company) on building long-term relationships and taking them even farther when new opportunities arise. In this case, he adds, the city of Stockton left the food and beverage provider selection up to IFG, and he believes that Sportservice's reputation was a critical selection factor.

"They trusted us and made the call," he says. It's all about relationships with us because we can do more than the publicly held companies. By maintaining relationships and developing them through the years, you can make exciting, successful things happen."

When it comes to the Stockton Arena, Abramson says Sportservice certainly is excited about the possibilities.

"It's a 10,000-seat arena with the ameni-

### Arena Amenities

- 247,000 gross square feet
- 344 premium club seats
- 5,200 s.f. multi-purpose room
- 1,975 s.f. outdoor terrace
- 6 permanent concession stands with 37 points-of-sale and 17 portable locations
- A 1,000 s.f. team store serving the 3 teams
- 24 "Gondola Suites" (Instead of being supported by a floor, these suites are suspended from the roof trusses, allowing the suite patrons to be closer to the action on the floor ... or on the ice.)
- 4 locker rooms
- 4 performer/star dressing rooms
- Fan deck with retractable seating.
- 600-car parking structure



The Arena's fabric "sails" add a soft, warm design touch, and can double for image projection.

ties of a 20,000-seat arena," he says. "I'd say it's the only venue of its kind in the country right now."

Reinsdorf also notes that because team ownership and facility management are controlled by IFG, the dynamics for marketing and revenue generation are extremely powerful.

"The key word is activation; advertisers want to be activated," he says, citing the example of the Jackson Rancheria, a Stockton-area Casino/Hotel that sponsored the Thunder's opening night game against Phoenix. "Advertisers like Jackson Rancheria want to be part of the activities; they want to be part of the games, not just passive advertisers with a banner. By having team ownership and Arena management under the same tent, we can easily deliver that activation. And we can create more value for the Arena and the anchor teams."

In fact, Reinsdorf adds, at Stockton Arena, IFG has vertically integrated the marketing departments across every aspect of the facility and teams – a rare but potentially very effective sales strategy.

"I've spoken to team owners who don't operate their facilities, and they have to compete with the facility for sponsor dollars," he

says. "In Stockton, we've created a successful recipe for working together. There is no need for that tension, or turf battles."

"And to the city's credit, they understood the value of team and operations integration. Now, we can focus on being creative and also staying focused on branding of the product," he says. "There is a single message from a sales standpoint."

"There isn't a facility this size that has the potential that the Stockton Arena offers, because of the way the building was designed and the model that IFG has tried to install there," Reinsdorf says. "It's all about maximizing revenue potential at the facility."

Moving to the Arena's elegant, modern and innovative design, Greene says IFG was pleased to work with 360 Architecture to consistently add value for the fans to the design. He cites the "Gondola suites," which hang out over the lower seating bowl, as a prime example.

"The suite location is comparable to a major league hockey arena, but you are much closer to the action," he says. "And these are full-amenity luxury suites, comparable to those in major NHL arenas."

Another interesting twist is the Fan Deck, an "end zone" retractable portion of the seating bowl (behind the stage at concerts) that

features an interactive, standing room space that is located only 15 rows from the hockey goal. That same area can be converted adding 1,200 seats for a basketball game (and increasing the Arena to an 11,203 capacity).

"When the seats are retracted, fans can stand there, watch the games, hang out together," Greene says. "Or, utilize the exhibits, let their kids shoot the puck, or play other activities and games."

## Seating

**Hockey:** 10,134 seats

**Basketball:** 11,193 seats

**Arena Football:** 9,763 seats

**Indoor Soccer:** 10,113 seats

**End Stage Event (Concert):** 10,414 seats

Greene says another distinguishing design element is the "sails" made of tensile fabric called Eventscape, which serves as the ceiling over the main concourse. This unique ceiling along with the huge glass wall facing Stockton, will provide dramatic views from the Arena.

According to lead designer Brad Schrock, principal, 360 Architecture, the site and building location on the historic waterfront fueled the Arena's initial nautical design concepts. With views toward downtown and directly adjacent to the Stockton Channel and Weber Point, the design team made it a priority to create strong visual connections between the Arena and its surroundings.

In addition, 360 Architecture used materials in unique applications. For example, it chose the Eventscape, which can be used to cast light or images from floor to ceiling (and can be seen from a distance). Another unique material, Proderma, a wood veneer product, was used on the outside to create a warm and pedestrian-friendly building. The highly transparent façade, in conjunction with sweeping wood-clad and metal forms, creates a facility that is warm and inviting at all times of the day and night.

"This building is an incredible new icon for the city of Stockton. We incorporated design elements that respected the community's nautical, agricultural and industrial heritage," notes Schrock.

Ryan Gedney, 360 Architecture's project designer, adds that 360 Architecture, by including the large glass wall, created a vast expanse of openness facing the Arena's waterfront side.

"A main priority was creating a bold visual connection between the interior of the arena and the surrounding parks and downtown," Gedney explains. "Many arenas are often very inward focused and closed off from their surroundings." 360 Architecture wanted to take a critical new look at how these facilities respond to the districts they ultimately inhabit. It believes that by creating such a large expanse of glass, the activity inside and outside the building start to become one in the same. "This basic approach ultimately shaped the building's design into something that we feel is truly unique and exciting," Gedney says.

IFG's Greene says 360 Architecture created true innovation within its design. "Certainly, they did some things that are very unique," Greene says.

No doubt that architectural innovation and fan friendly feeling will translate into some strong numbers for sports and entertainment events.

The Stockton Arena sits in a prime location, and IFG's Rodems believes that fact will be a natural for drawing both high-quality performers and fans alike to the venue. It doesn't hurt that Stockton has a potential fan base/audience of 2.2 million people within a 60-mile

radius (there also are 675,000 people in San Joaquin County, of which Stockton is the county seat).

"This is a real untapped, underserved market," Rodems says. "Much like downtown San Jose before they built their arena, Stockton was a fairly large city with no focal point or center. But now, you have a population that is in growth mode as a bedroom community. Understandably, the city is extremely excited because the Arena will provide entertainment that will rival that of San Jose or Sacramento. People won't need to travel any more to see great shows, sports and other events."

Stockton also "routes well," according to IFG's Joe Briglia, vice president, business development, meaning it's a natural location

for promoters looking to book acts in the larger facilities in Northern California.

"Promoters have two key objectives," Briglia says. "They want to make money selling tickets and want to be able to route efficiently. That also gives Stockton a competitive advantage."

In the end, IFG's Reinsdorf is extremely pleased with the entire project's outcome.

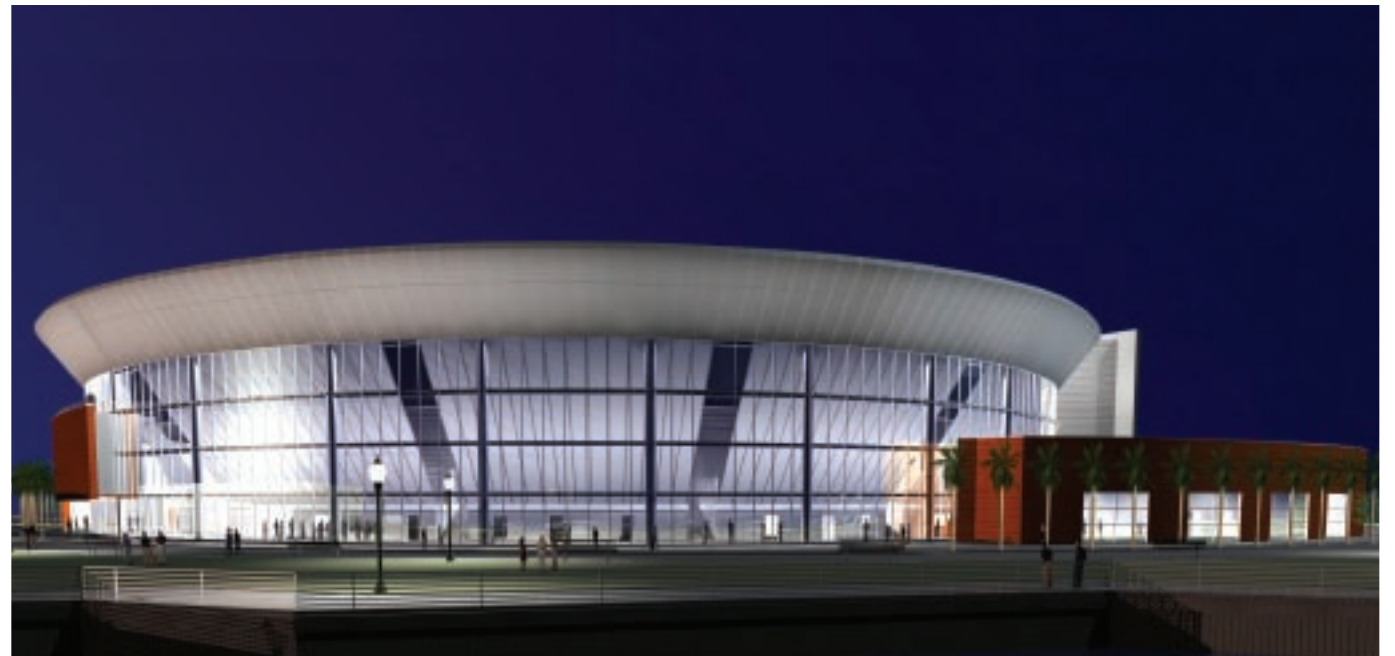
"The building has a true 'wow' factor," he says. "The finishes are knockouts; it really reflects how beautiful Stockton is.

"Every market calls for its own design, and in this case the seating bowl is much more intimate and warm than other 10,000-seat arenas," he says. "The finishes are more high end, the kind of material you would find at a four-star hotel, especially in the clubs

and suites."

That's due, in part, because the city recognized early on that if the building was properly funded, it eventually could be the bold statement they were trying to make to draw attention to this exciting, growing region.

"The city had to ultimately share the vision to benefit from the success," Reinsdorf says. They have taken full advantage of IFG's expertise and we're thankful they gave us the opportunity to be fully integrated with every aspect of this project. Having said that, we're still there in partnership with the city. It's a natural fit for our company. We were drawn to the market, but in turn, our experience has drawn the market to us. We believe the Stockton Arena sets a new standard for mid-sized venues."



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