

Los Angeles Times

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SUNDAY, OCTOBER 10, 1999
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These Details Aren't Small

■ Staples Center vice president of operations worries about everything, down to the last shower head, so no hurdle becomes a big deal.

By DAVID WHARTON
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Everyone knows about the luxury suites and the private cigar club. Everyone can see the high-tech scoreboard hanging from the ceiling.

But a building as vast as Staples Center, a mind-boggling million square feet, requires tremendous attention to detail. For every big glitzy feature, there are scores of anonymous odds and ends.

Little things that become crucial when it comes to running the only arena in the nation with two basketball teams, a hockey team, indoor football and countless special events (beginning with Sunday night's Bruce Springsteen concert).

Things such as Shaquille O'Neal-sized shower heads, built nine feet high, in the locker rooms.

And emergency medical facilities that include not only an X-ray machine but also a dentist's chair for when those hockey players lose a tooth.

"You can't even imagine," said Lee Zeidman, who, as vice president of operations, sweats the small stuff. "There are millions of details."

The hockey and basketball white-tiled shower rooms also include a shower head that is 6 feet high, barely high enough for Tyronn Lue.

"The Americans with Disabilities Act," said Michael Roth, an arena spokesman. "You can't build a shower room without one."

• Low shower heads are just one of the features that could earn the arena a reputation as a disabled-friendly facility, said Kevin G. McGuire, who advises this venue and dozens more nationwide.

Wheelchair areas are located throughout the building. "A lot of the

time, arenas tend to segregate people who are disabled around the back of the goal," McGuire said. For concerts and ice shows, blocks of the premium seats, so called "deaf zones"—are reserved for the hearing and sight impaired.

The arena also made special accommodations in the suites, where construction superintendent, Ellen Way installed special, and expensive, mini-refrigerators that fit under counter tops, built low for wheelchair accessibility.

"It's much like a nice hotel," Way said. "People are spending lots of money so everything has to be just right."

"People with disabilities are going to have a completely different experience than they are used to."

- Kevin McGuire,
McGuire Associates, Inc.
ADA consultant

Eventually, the arena will make use of the Global Positioning System, loaning blind guests equipment that will help them know where they are standing in the building and give them directions to the nearest restroom or refreshment stand.

"Even with the small things... this building is night-and-day better," McGuire said. "People with disabilities are going to have a completely different experience than they are used to."

• With millions of guests expected to attend 200 events in the next 12 months, there will be a lot of mouths to feed.

General Manager Bobby Goldwater fussed over the warming trays that go in the buffets and suites, testing various models until he found one with a handle that was not hot to the touch. The arena has several large pantries —

instead of the usual two or three— and a stream of delivery trucks each day.

"Our loading dock is so busy," said Michael Thom, the executive chef. "Today, we took in 4,000 pounds of beef tenderloin."

Arena executives also bought the rights to Whistle Stop roast beef sandwiches, so they could transplant the longtime Forum favorite to their building.

• The smallest thing requires a lot of attention. Like the 3,000 keys that unlock the arena's 1,000 doors. Regular keys for specific doors. Master keys for every door on a specific concourse. Grand master keys for a larger group of doors— to the three suite levels, for instance. And great-grand-master keys for every door in the building.

All those keys require policies and procedures of their own.

"You have to walk through the whole building and classify who needs to go where and which doors they need to go through," Zeidman said. "You have to keep track of all the keys because if you lose a great-grand-master, you've got to re-key the entire facility."

Now, with everything finally in place, Zeidman must keep it all in working order.

If the lights go out in one of the suites, he can't wait for a repair service to come out the next week. There is no time to spare if something goes awry with the hydraulics that move the bleachers when the arena is switching from hockey to basketball.

So his staff includes around-the-clock electricians, engineers, and mechanics. His inventory includes 500 boxes of seat parts, 17 pallets of ceiling tiles and rolls of carpeting.

"We'll fill a warehouse just with the spare parts we have left over," he said. "I've got to go rent storage space."

One more detail to worry about at the nation's busiest arena.

"A screw here, a bolt there," Zeidman said. "People have no idea."