

Florida Citrus Sports, Generating Economic Impact

2020

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Host: Podcasting from Orlando, Florida, this is the Lowndes Client Corner, where we highlight and celebrate our law firm clients and the many achievements. Who are we featuring today?

William T. Dymond: Today we're interviewing Steve Hogan, Chief Executive Officer of Florida Citrus Sports, a non-profit event management organization that is responsible for the Vrbo Citrus Bowl, Camping World Bowl, Camping World Kickoff game, Florida Blue Classic and other Central Florida based events generating economic impact.

One of Steve's biggest achievements was helping to bring the upcoming NFL Pro Bowl to Orlando from Hawaii, raising the profile of Camping World Stadium and Orlando's big event hospitality prowess. Another was Florida Citrus Sports investing in the community surrounding the Camping World Stadium with LIFT Orlando, and other community partners, in making our community better. I'm your host Bill Dymond. Let's find out more about our guest today. Hello Steve. I really appreciate you taking time to join us for this podcast.

Steve Hogan: Hey Bill, thanks for thinking of me. Looking forward to doing it.

William T. Dymond: Sure. How did you get involved in Florida Citrus Sports? Can you tell us a little bit about your background?

Steve Hogan: Yeah, you know, when I graduated from University of Central Florida in '91, unfortunately in my path through school I didn't really have an exact direction and just sales seemed like the natural spot for me. So I went to work for McCaw Communications, the largest cellular provider at the time. Cellular One was the brand name, and that was largely based out of Tampa's business office in Lakeland and those areas.

So I worked there a couple of years. Moved into the newspaper side from a sales perspective and worked there for another two, three years. And at that point I just realized that I wasn't happy with what I was doing and fortunately had a family relationship, a connection to Florida Citrus Sports and heard there was an event management opening here.

And so I came and interviewed with Chuck Rohe for that job and was lucky enough that he gave it to me. And I couldn't tell you how excited I was a week, two weeks, three weeks into the job, it just spoke to me. I just was invigorated by it. Had zero passion for what I was doing in the first two iterations, but really fell in love with this, and the rest is kind of history. Since 1995, enjoyed a great career here with a lot of great leaders and some successes to be proud of.

William T. Dymond: A great career indeed. Interesting you started with event management. Florida Citrus Sports hosts many events in the community, including the recent NCAA football games that we had over the holiday season. But not everyone understands what the organization does. Can you explain Florida Citrus Sports' role in arranging these games?

Steve Hogan: Yeah, it's exciting. It is a not for profit organization, but that is a tax status obviously versus a business philosophy. We definitely want to generate resources and revenue so that we can invest those back into really our mission,

which is impacting this community, both economically, socioeconomically. That's our mission. That's what we're in business to do, put people in hotel rooms. Drive the hotel bed collection tax. Expose this destination as widely as we can around the world through broadcasts and streams and news stories and earned media opportunities.

And we just happen to do that through sports and entertainment events. And, you know, in that way, we are the tenant in Camping World Stadium. The owner is the City of Orlando and manager of the building. But we're - we act very much like a professional franchise that is a tenant of a major facility. Some of the events we own and operate, like the now soon to be 75-year-old Vrbo Citrus Bowl on New Years Day.

Our other Bowl games, the Camping World Bowl, Florida Blue, Florida Classic, as been mentioned and many others that we own and have owned over the years and partnered events, like the NFL Pro Bowl coming up. It's an event that they own, but Florida Citrus Sports partnered with them in order to make the entire hosting model work here in the community. And the Classic is kind of a partnered model. We've done other events like pre-season NFL football games that fall into that category. Certainly collegiate spring games, on and on and on.

And then lastly, you play a role in third parties producing their own organic events in sports facilities like Camping World Stadium, and we support those nonetheless and have certain integrations with those, from premium seating and other things that you would expect here in the stadium. So I would describe us as a company who's here to drive impact for this community, and we want to just do more of that.

William T. Dymond: Fantastic. Driving impact and you mentioned investing in your mission, obviously generating dollars is important. What is the economic impact of Florida Citrus Sports and the events it stages in our community? And maybe talk a little bit if you would about the recent game's impact on our community.

Steve Hogan: Sure, it ebbs and flows with the schedule for the season, our core business, just the three games alone, the two Bowl games, Camp World Bowl and the Vrbo Citrus Bowl, along with the Florida Blue, Florida Classic, will generate often north of \$150 million a year. The stadium itself is in the \$300 million a year economic impact range. And that doesn't even begin to speak for exposure impact. When you talk about - and it's like the NFL Pro Bowl, which last year had billions of impressions within the earned media space and social conversations, not to mention broadcast (sounds like: reads) for the skills challenge in the game itself.

When you think of that exposure across a building that's largely known for hosting unique, neutral site events, most all of those are nationally or internationally distributed. And essentially that drives massive exposure impact for the Orlando brand and destination. So that's in the billions of impressions. So we're very proud of that. If you think about the stadium generating north of \$300 million in direct economic impact and billions of impressions, literally tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars in media value for the destination, is really the best way to describe this kind of economic engine here at Camping World Stadium.

William T. Dymond: Powerful stuff. Maybe Steve if you would, tell us a little bit about the investment in the mission and in the community and maybe in particular, talk about the Orlando at risk communities in the area and your involvement with LIFT Orlando.

Steve Hogan: Well Bill, you would know it as well as anybody, the investments that the community has made in Camping World Stadium in recent history, has largely been through the help of business leaders like yourself. You were there with us from the beginning and as a past leader of this organization, couldn't be more proud of that. And no differently is LIFT Orlando, which has enjoyed tons of support here from a business community joining residents, to try and find creative solutions to some complex socioeconomic issues here in the neighborhoods that surround Camping World Stadium.

And so when we saw that investment in the stadium and Bill, you were right next to me in starting to talk to people like Tom (sounds like: Sydima) and AdventHealth at the time with (sounds like: Cy Seliva) and others in an early conversation, where all of kind of were saying, there's got to be a way to leverage that investment in the sports and entertainment venue in the interests of the families that literally live in the shadow of the building. And that was the desire we all had. It took a little while. We were running around town all of us with that in our heart and our minds, and we ran into each other as both successful things over the course of a dinner and a glass of wine and found out that this is a winner. This is a different way to approach how we can all invest our time and our treasure and resources into maybe approaching these challenges differently than we all have in the early parts of our lives and our careers.

And so I would just say it was a strong desire to do it. It was a strong desire to see that we could positively affect some of these issues. And I think as we got into it, we just got more excited about that work, and we started to see the fruits of our labors very quickly. And I will tell you as I look back now, you think six years in, that you could have dreamed in some of those early discussions that you'd have over \$100 million in capital investments in a three

quarter of a square mile footprint around Camping World Stadium here and the communities now known as Westlakes, that are either already open, under construction or soon to break ground in the first quarter of 2020, I would have told you you're crazy.

But here we are, and 200 families living in mixed income affordable housing community. A hundred and twenty soon to move into a senior affordable mixed income housing opportunity. Early education building already topped off, moving its first class in. Soon to be a health and wellness building for 30,000 square feet will open in Lake Lorna Doone Park to a \$9 million, state of the art capacity here in May for the community to enjoy. And so many more things to come.

But to me it's been the relationships that all of us as business leaders, through in some way sports and entertainment, that we've been able to develop a communication chain, a real understanding and appreciation for each other that has been the base, the foundation for all of that success. You could go spend money anywhere and build things, but they're really meaningless without the actual buy in, communication, respect and understanding of the neighborhood and the business leaders who look to join them in this journey. So one of the proudest things I'll say I've ever been a part of, and I'm sure you'd say the same.

William T. Dymond: I would and Florida Citrus Sports' role and impact has been powerful and unquestioned in that journey, and we thank you for that. You got to keep it up. So let's talk about the future. What does the future hold for Central Florida sports and maybe share what your expectations are for the upcoming Pro Bowl, which will be staged here in Orlando in a little over a week.

Steve Hogan: Yeah, so excited for that, year four. I never knew that we'd have an opportunity to have the NFL here for one of their signature events for one year, much less four. So couldn't be more proud of that. We expect, for the first time maybe, in the previous three iterations, we expect to have good weather on game day. But \$45 million plus economic impact, you're going to see largely a billion impressions of conversations around Orlando and the Pro Bowl subject. That's been the trend the last couple of years. Again, the power of these events for really exposing our community.

So we expect a packed stadium, great weather, 88 of the most recognizable players on the planet in this sport and a ton of kids and a ton of families, getting about as close to them as you can in any NFL setting in the world. And that's what the NFL Pro Bowl is, and I think that's what Orlando and the Central Florida community has done for the Pro Bowl. Unlocking that family relationship. And that's what it does for all those events. And when you look at the future, especially where Florida Citrus Sports is concerned, our focus is on how you take what's already been an amazingly successful business, driving impact and how do you kind of double that, triple that, quadruple that? We need to expand our business model to really work in other verticals.

How do we leverage Camping World Stadium and the broader grounds? When you think about youth sporting events, music events. This year we co-partnered with City of Orlando in landing a concert with Live Nation that's already at 38,000 seats. We're very excited about that. Music festivals, looking to where the gaming marketplace in terms of e-gaming is.

So we really want to see both a capital infusion into Camping World Stadium grounds, with an eye to the future and then how our organization can expand into other vertical focuses for our business model that can see us really honestly quadruple the impact that we're having on the community today.

And I'm excited about that because I think Orlando can be the national and international leader in all of these sectors. And we're just going to line up some of the facilities necessary to see that dream come true.

William T. Dymond: Fantastic stuff. You touched a little bit on future trends and e-sports. Anything else you see coming in the sports industry?

Steve Hogan: You know, I think the key word is diversification. When you look at the dates in any one of these venues, whether it's art center or whether it's an Amway Center and arenas or whether it's stadiums and outdoor venues, the ability for you to utilize un-utilized dates on the property by diversification of capabilities is exactly what you have to be focused on. You'd be remiss if not saying just tech in general. Tech as a solution for all the above, but really customer integration, customer experience with all of these events and venues is critical.

So you're just seeing where the world is today and how people access inventory, whether that be tickets, parking, event integrations and experiences while you're at the events themselves. Tech has to be significantly invested in by this organization, by this community, by this venue. And so I think those are just kind of two key words that bubble up for me as you talk about future trends. It's really diversification and capability and a much deeper commitment to tech holistically around what we do.

William T. Dymond: Steve, thank you. Thanks for your time today and for telling us about Florida Citrus Sports. Extremely, extremely positive impact that the organization and you at the helm have on the Central Florida community. So very much appreciate your personal efforts, your hard work. I think our audience has a better understanding of what Florida Citrus Sports does and

what it means to our community and our community is certainly stronger because of you. So thank you.

Steve Hogan: Thanks Bill.

Host: Thank you for listening to this episode of the Lowndes Client Corner. Be sure to join us next time for another Lowndes Client Corner interview. Learn more at Lowndesclientcorner.com. Lowndes is a multi service law firm advising public and private businesses across multiple industries. Proud to serve Central Florida and beyond for 50 years. Learn more at Lowndes/law.com.

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