

NAADD



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James Madison University (JMU) debuted its sparkling new Atlantic Union Bank Center in November 2020. The \$140 million project features an overall 226,000-square-foot building with an 8,500-seat arena, separate practice gym, team success areas and an adjacent 1,500-vehicle parking deck. The building is packed with technology, including 23 Daktronics displays, a state-of-the-art sound system and other modern features.

Private fundraising contributed significantly to the project with a combination of major gifts and named-gift opportunities in various rooms and spaces throughout the building. Corporate gifts included two major naming-rights agreements with the overall facility naming for Atlantic Union Bank as well as an in-venue agreement with UVA Orthopedics.

While the building includes the typical “donor wall” commemorating major gifts, JMU experienced notable success with a unique “charter wall” concept. Supporters could select between three size options to make a gift of \$1,500, \$3,000 or \$6,000 to leave a permanent, personalized message on a designated wall within the arena. The wall quickly sold out and infused significant financing into the project.

Once construction was completed, the JMU Duke Club employed a variety of targeted tours to boost interest in season tickets and premium seating options. The building features courtside seats for the first time in JMU’s basketball history and an adjacent courtside lounge area for those guests. There is also a 500-seat club room, two suites and loge seating options to provide a variety of premium offerings for donors.

The mixture of seat options in a vastly improved layout, combined with modern technology, have significantly boosted the game day atmosphere and overall interest in JMU basketball, particularly on the men’s side. As the 2022 season neared its conclusion, attendance hovered near 4,400 and ranked 101st in the nation for Division I men’s basketball. The final

season in JMU’s Convocation Center in 2020 averaged 2,435 fans per game to rank 179th. JMU’s already strong women’s attendance has also had a climb of about 20 spots to 38th in the nation at 2,501 per game.

The building has quickly become desirable as a hub for events in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley, drawing praise as a multi-purpose venue and as one of the best college basketball facilities in the nation among peer institutions.

In just one year of full operation, the Atlantic Union Bank Center has hosted a sold-out concert, the Harlem Globetrotters, the CAA Men’s Basketball Championship, campus events of all varieties (large-scale meetings, commencement, orientation, campus visitation events, etc.), the public press conference announcing JMU’s transition to the Sun Belt Conference and a memorial service for two local police officers killed in the line of duty. Each event has validated the care and planning that went into maximizing the design of the facility for the needs of JMU and the local community.

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NAATSO



Amanda Rider

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When I was first promoted to run our Ticket Operations department in 2018, we were right in the middle of an expansion of our football stadium which added an upper deck, while also trying to switch ticket system providers. Then in 2020, we opened a brand new 4,000-seat arena for our men’s and women’s basketball and volleyball programs. Now, we are in the midst of another expansion of our football stadium to add premium seating and updating our west side of the stadium to all chairbacks. With all of these changes to facilities over the last four years, I have learned two main things to make sure that we can service and accommodate our fans in the best possible way, as well as making sure the needs of our ticket office are met!

Communicate your needs (and wants) early

– When going through our football expansion in 2018, it wasn’t until the week of the first game that we realized our student gate entrance didn’t have any wireless access points for our scanners to use and that our new ticket booth didn’t have a countertop in it. We learned from that issue in 2018 with the football stadium to communicate our needs early when we were in the planning stages of our new arena. We worked with our planning and construction team, campus IT, and our events and facilities office to make sure from the start they knew our plans for where we needed wireless access points, what we needed the gate set-up to look like so they could add outlets for metal detectors without having to run long cords, and we even had them add an extra window into the ticket booth so that we could have a dedicated pass list window instead of being at a table in the lobby. By communicating these things early, we were able to adjust the plans to make sure they were accomplished instead of trying to fix issues after construction was done.

Establish your timeline and stick to it – In the ticket operations world, having to build new facilities or change manifests in our ticket systems takes time. When we can’t verify physical seats till construction is finished, it is imperative that we get an accurate seating layout from the seat installation company so that we can update the system so our sales and development teams can know what they are working with to fill the seats. Make sure you establish with the project managers the timeline that you need to have the seating manifest and then stick to it. When they are working through the full construction project, they don’t understand the needs of getting the seats into the system, going through seat selection processes if you need to, working with third-party ticket printing vendors, and so on.

It can be nerve-wracking to open new facilities or have seat changes for the first time, but if you can communicate your needs early and stick to your timeline, the process goes a lot smoother!

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