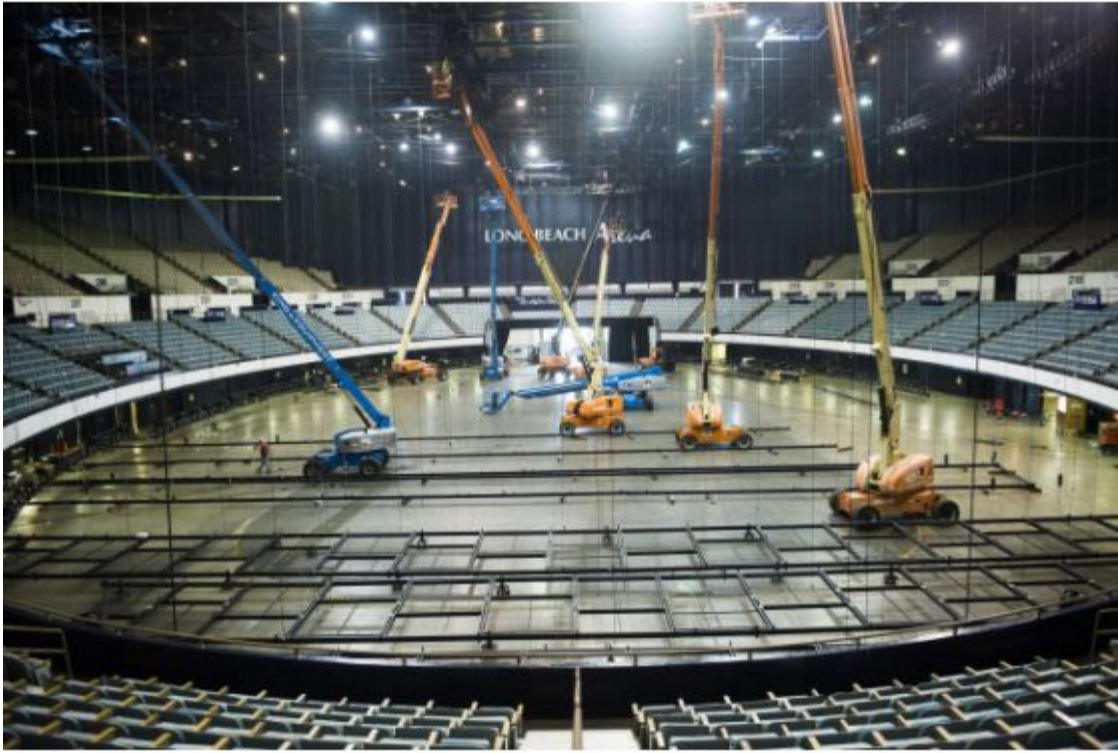


Grid going up at Long Beach Arena



By **PAT MAIO** / By Pat Maio LONG BEACH REGISTER

The 51-year old Long Beach Arena has a new look: strands of cable, eight miles worth, holding up 500,000 pounds of steel, with silver and blue curtains, lights and speakers.

Last week, six boom lifts holding welders were extended to 74 feet above the arena's floor. The welders attached long strands of cable, connected to pulleys and a floating tension grid system – kind of like an Erector set -- to the arena's roof. Gone are the white ceiling tiles, exposing the roof's steel girders, which have been painted blue.

The cables will eventually hold 500,000 pounds of steel – including trusses, cable, pulleys, winches and the grid system that spans across the roof of the Long Beach Arena. The steel contraption also will have curtains attached to its edges, along the trusses.

When raised, the area in the middle of the arena can be divided into sections depending on the size of the rented space and venue, according to Charlie Beirne, general manager of the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center and who is overseeing this massive project.

“It’ll be the first tension grid that can be raised and lowered, anywhere in the world” to accommodate various events, Beirne boasted. It will take 24 minutes to move up and down.

This is the centerpiece of a \$10 million arena makeover that is meant to draw more events and conventions, boosting hotel stays and the local economy in the process. The Convention & Entertainment

Center has already booked \$20 million in new business thanks to the renovated arena, with another \$40 million pending, according to the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Syracuse, N.Y.-based JR Clancy is the engineering and structural stage-rigging firm that designed and built the arena's truss work and grid system.

"It's very unique," said Bridget Cox, director of project management for JR Clancy. "A lot of arenas from around the world will be intrigued by this. It's one-of-a-kind."

The 128-year-old JR Clancy is a leading international provider of stage rigging equipment and installation services to theaters, museums, concert halls, arenas, studios and other facilities. It designed and built the rigging for Segerstrom Center for Performing Arts in Costa Mesa; the Star Centre for Performing Arts in Singapore; Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts in Miami; and Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts in Kansas City, among many others.

Cox said that the so-called "flying catwalk system" was designed and built on site over the past year with arena architects, and with the cooperation of SMG, the arena's management company. "We don't know how well publicized this is yet. We don't want to jinx anything. We usually wait until a project is complete," she said.

Most of the \$7 million steel grid and other parts were lying on the floor, waiting to be raised.

In addition to the grid, \$3 million is being spent to create Bogart & Co., a hip dining and lounge area for executives who want to cut deals, for instance, while attending conventions at the center. The renovation also includes a modernized lobby located just outside the main entrance to the arena that has huge spherical lanterns dangling from the ceiling, new carpeting, renovated restrooms and cushy couches.

The curtain on the grid and truss system will be raised by bridling it together with cables and pulleys as it is moved to its traditional height of 30 feet above the floor, giving everyone a clear view of the floor space from anywhere in the 13,500-seat arena. When the curtain is down, it creates a smaller, intimate atmosphere for a few hundred people, or a lavish dinner for 5,500 guests.

It'll be a marketing plus for the Convention and Visitors Bureau, which hopes to use the city-owned arena as part of its sales pitch to bring more conventions, galas and other intimate venues. It's to be named the Pacific Ballroom at the Long Beach Arena, which in years past hosted the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Eagles and NHL hockey. It'll keep its concrete floor for Disney on Ice shows.

A state-of-the-art lighting, sound and video system is to be added in the next few weeks, all of which can be controlled with an iPad.

"It's like putting ornaments on the Christmas tree," Beirne said.

The Convention & Entertainment Center oversees the arena, two theaters and the convention center in downtown. The Convention and visitors Bureau is the official umbrella group for convention and tourism marketing in the city, and is funded by city hotel bed taxes, formally known as "transient occupancy taxes." Funding to spruce up the arena comes from the tidelands fund, a city purse which helps pay for beach and marina services, among other things.

The arena is preparing for its first soft-opening event with the new curtain and grid system Oct. 12 when the Long Beach-based International City Theatre holds its annual fundraiser.

A formal celebration to showcase the new-look Pacific Ballroom for everyone else is planned Nov. 20.

pmaio@lregister.com, 562-243-5497

8 groups signed contracts. This represents an estimated economic impact of \$27.9 million to the city and \$514,000 in estimated hotel bed tax.

17 groups have expressed interest. This represents a potential economic impact of \$38.5 million and \$2 million in hotel bed tax.

The ballroom bonanza. The new ballroom gives the city \$20 million in new business, with another \$40 million pending.

Source: Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau

Weight of truss and floating grid, cables, pulleys and winches: 500,000 pounds

Length of cable used: 8 miles

Arena opened: 1962

Bands that played in arena: Beatles, Rolling Stones, Eagles

Cost of modernization: \$10 million

Source: Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau