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U.S. Bank Stadium, one year in review

By ERIC BEST

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The landmark of East Town brought in 1.6 million visitors in its inaugural year

East Town residents began watching U.S. Bank Stadium rise more than four years ago.

Now, more than a year after it opened its five massive doors, the home of the Minnesota Vikings has hosted a lot more than football games.

In its first year, more than 1.6 million visitors flocked to more than 600 events at the \$1.1-billion stadium.

General Manager Patrick Talty with stadium operator SMG called U.S. Bank Stadium a “monumental project” that is uniquely versatile as an NFL facility. SMG operates five other NFL facilities in addition to the roughly 66,000-capacity stadium.

“Our operation provides opportunities to host a broad range of events, putting Minnesota on the world’s stage. The diversity and quantity of events hosted in our first year is unparalleled in the sports and entertainment industry,” Talty said in a statement.

The first major event at the stadium was an International Champions Cup soccer match between A.C. Milan and Chelsea F.C. Jenn Hathaway, director of communications for the Minnesota Sports Facilities Authority, said the sold-out game wouldn’t have been played in the Metrodome.

ESPN’s X Games ended the year of operation, bringing 110,000 visitors to the neighborhood for four days of extreme sports and nightly concerts in the Commons park. It’ll return to the stadium next year.

“Those events would not have come here if we had not had the building,” she said. “What people are wanting more is being able to be in a world-class facility.”

The Vikings made a big show of coming to U.S. Bank Stadium, winning their first game there against rivals the Green Bay Packers. The team went 8-8 in the first season at the stadium, winning five of eight home games on the new turf.

“U.S. Bank Stadium immediately became one of the most recognizable stadiums in the world,” said team owner Mark Wilf. “We are thrilled with the game experience the stadium offers to Vikings fans, the home field atmosphere it gives to our team and the positive impact the venue has already had on Minnesota.”

Youth games remain one of the cheapest ways to experience the stadium, with tickets typically going for \$5–\$10. High school and college teams played well over 150 games at U.S. Bank Stadium, including the Minnesota State High School League soccer and football championships and the Dairy Queen Classic college baseball game. Nearly 30,000 fans watched more than 140 college and high school baseball games in the stadium’s first year.

Major concerts have also played a big role in the stadium’s first year, from country music singer Luke Bryan’s show last summer to the Guns N’ Roses show this past July. Coldplay and U2 kicked off its second year, playing for full houses before the summer’s end. This time next year, pop star Ed Sheeran is set to fill the arena.

While it’s one of the state’s largest venues, U.S. Bank Stadium was home to many small-scale events throughout its first year. The stadium hosted 425 private events ranging from weddings — none on the turf yet, however, Hathaway said — corporate meetings, parties and conventions. Residents also got in free at the stadium’s Party of the Plaza outdoor concert series.

About 88,000 guests have roamed its 1.75 million square feet at 3,850 ticketed, 90-minute tours. Stadium staff release more tour dates regularly.

“That’s been very, very successful,” Hathaway said.

Fans of the open rollerblading time at the Metrodome were able to roller skate or run around the stadium at 17 events that frequently sold out. The Super Bowl will reduce the number of skating and running club events, but Hathaway said the program will return in the stadium’s second year.

The first year is just the beginning for U.S. Bank Stadium, which will host huge national events like the 2019 NCAA Men’s Final Four and the 2020 NCAA Wrestling Championships. The biggest thing on the stadium’s horizon is undoubtedly Super Bowl LII, a

10-day football extravaganza that is expected to bring 1 million people to the Twin Cities next February.

“The building is living up to the spirit of the stadium legislation, that it be a resource for all Minnesotans. From youth football, to high school championships, to concerts and Vikings games, the stadium has events for almost every interest level,” said Kathleen Blatz, interim chair of the MSFA.

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