

Long Beach Debuts New State-of-the-Art Venue

A major \$7-million has completely transformed the Pacific Ballroom at the Long Beach Arena.

By Deanna Ting
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On Nov. 20, the city of Long Beach, Calif., feted its newest events venue — the state-of-the-art, 46,000-square-foot Pacific Ballroom at the Long Beach Arena. Housed within the Long Beach Arena, which was originally built in the 1960s primarily as a sports venue, the new Pacific Ballroom offers planners a multi-purpose event space with one-of-a-kind lighting and sound capabilities, and a groundbreaking, customizable ceiling structure.

Steve Goodling, president and CEO of the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau (LBCVB), spoke during the grand opening ceremony, which began on the evening of Nov. 20, thanking the city's numerous partners for their work in putting together the massive project. More than 1,300 guests were invited to attend the gala, called "Sky Transformation," and performances included the Earth Harp Collective by William Close among others. One of the night's most memorable moments was the big "reveal" when a section of the arena's curtains disappeared seamlessly, doubling the floor space by nearly half.

Existing floor space from the arena was used to create the new ballroom and above the space, a suspended steel tension grid supports its LED and stage lighting, as well as sound systems and other decorative elements. The largest "flying" grid of its kind in the U.S., weighing in at more than 500,000 pounds, the ceiling can also be easily raised and lowered to create different environments for each individual event, as it did during the grand opening. The new ballroom space can seat 3,288 for a banquet set-up, 5,500 for a reception, and up to 4,890 for a theater-style setting.

Two long-established architects worked on the new ballroom — Architect of Record John Fisher or JSFA Inc. and Associate Architect Jerry Sherman. Sherman, who also helped design and oversaw the construction of Long Beach's 10,000-seat swim stadium in 2004, explained "The essence of this project is to transform the arena into a multi-purpose 'loft-ballroom' space that creates a unique theatrical environment ... Our interior "canopy" floats over the event space, creating another dimension to the space below that will define each and every event in its own special way." "This transformation may be the first of its type in the U.S.," added Fisher.

The Pacific Ballroom's theater design consultant, Michael Ferguson, who also serves as the director of the Los Angeles office of Theatre Projects Consultants, said, "From a purely performance perspective, the most exciting aspect is that this is a blank canvas. The Pacific Ballroom provides a well-appointed flexible space, ready to be transformed to suit the needs and vision of the event."

The Arena project creates "new possibilities" for meeting and event planners. It dramatically

increases the convention center's ability to bring in new convention groups and special events by providing a larger and more versatile event space. This new space is showing a positive economic impact for Long Beach even before it opens. As of September 2013, the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau already has definite bookings worth more than \$27 million in economic impact for the city. These are groups that specifically needed the added space the Pacific Ballroom offers. Clients worth more than \$33 million are also considering Long Beach.

Steve Goodling, president and CEO of the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau (LBCVB), also noted, "The new loft-style ballroom and event space is an incredible 'out-of-the-box design,' something that's never been done before, and it's being done for the first time, in Long Beach. This gives our sales team multiple new opportunities to sell this event space. Its flexible versatility allows for many types of special events, both for our convention clients and our local community groups."

As of September, the LBCVB had already secured bookings for the new space that amount to more than \$27 million in economic impact for the city. The new ballroom can also be used in conjunction with two other event spaces at the Long Beach Arena — the 19,000 square-foot Pacific Gallery and the 6,425-square-foot Bogart & Co dining/lounge venue.