



[Lowell Sun News](#)

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BIGGER AUDIENCES, LOWER DEFICIT AT LOWELL MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM

LOWELL -- Lowell Memorial Auditorium has turned around its fortunes, with higher-than-expected attendance, more bookings and better financial position than in past years, its management company says.

Spectra Venue Management said it had more than 99,000 people pass through turnstiles for events last budget year, which ended June 30. It hosted 102 events, an increase of five over the prior year, and narrowed what has been a perennial budget loss for the facility.

"It's looking great," Spectra General Manager Keith Vaske said. "I think last year was a great year for us."

The recent announcement comes amid a stretch of criticism for management company Spectra Venue Management, as some of the high-profile bookings that had hit town in the past had dried up.

The aging city-owned facility also has a backlog of needed repairs. Its balcony was recently closed and its structural integrity tested after the balcony appeared to be bouncing while patrons were jumping up and down on it. Tests have shown that the balcony is structurally sound.

The auditorium has had its share of dance competitions, which are more reliable bookings but not likely to draw much for attendance. But other events have pushed attendance in the 2016 budget year to an increase of 14,000 over the prior year.

Spectra lauded its event lineup, which featured country-music stars Chase Rice and Chris Young, hip-hop artist Toby Mac, rock band Casting Crowns, and the WWE NXT wrestling event.

"There's a risk-and-reward situation when we're booking shows," Vaske said. "We're getting the (big) names."

The 3,000-seat auditorium has rarely, if ever, been a financial windfall for the city. Even in what was seen as its heyday, when it was run by Mill City Management, the auditorium ran six-figure deficits.

Spectra took over in 2013, and the city has done more to eliminate its share of costs when the facility runs a deficit.

The auditorium was in the red by about \$84,000, the lowest deficit Spectra reported. In the company's first year managing the center, that deficit was just over \$400,000.

Several improvements have recently been completed at the auditorium, including new portable seats and reupholstered fixed seating, a new main hall floor and a new stage curtain. New carpeting and a new concourse floor are being added now.

Next on the list are renovated and expanded restrooms. The city has committed \$250,000 in its capital budget for that and other potential work.