

[The Morning Call](#)

Friday, January 27, 2016

AHL ALL-STAR CLASSIC BIG BOOST TO LEHIGH VALLEY'S ECONOMY

As much as hosting this weekend's 2017 AHL All-Star Classic means to Jim and Rob Brooks, the Lehigh Valley Phantoms owners, it's just as important to the area itself.

The Brooks brothers understood that and it's one of the main reasons they bid to bring the game to the PPL Center in downtown Allentown.

Mike Stershic, president of Discover Lehigh Valley, estimated when the AHL first announced the Classic was coming to Allentown last April that the game could generate somewhere between \$500,000 and \$750,000 in the local economy. Earlier this week, Stershic was sticking to those numbers.

The two most recent events held in the Lehigh Valley that Stershic thought were comparable were the 2009 U.S. Women's Open at Saucon Valley Country Club and the 2010 Triple-A All-Star Game at Coca-Cola Park in Allentown.

Obviously area restaurants won't see any effects from the Classic until this weekend but local hotels have already witnessed a boost.

The Allentown Renaissance, which is attached to the PPL Center, is already completely booked for Sunday and Monday and has been for quite some time. Paul Sharp, the Renaissance's Director of Sales and Marketing, said the AHL set aside a block of about 130 rooms dedicated to league administrators, officials, players, coaches which sold out about 60 days ago. The rest of the rooms were booked about 45 days ago.

With some officials coming in early, they were even close to selling out for Saturday, according to Sharp on Thursday afternoon.

The next closest hotel to the arena, the Holiday Inn in Downtown Allentown, is also seeing a huge bump in business directly related to the All-Star Classic.

J.R. Lebron, the hotel's general manager, said they "have a tremendous turnout" because of the game and as of Thursday afternoon were about 80 percent occupied for this weekend. He estimated that normally over those days they might be 30 percent occupied, if that.

Sharp noted that the timing of the event is great because not only does it come during slower months – typically January, February and March – the business is coming on days of the week that they typically struggle to fill. He said Sundays are typically the worst since it's the last day of the weekend and there tends to be less travel on those days.

While the spending at restaurants and hotels can all be calculated, there's also the exposure the Valley will receive – mainly on television – which has an impact on the local economy as well. And that's harder to measure.

"On air, there's a lot of conversation about where we are, a lot of conversation about the Lehigh Valley and both the community and the region," David Andrews, the AHL's president and CEO, said. "It's hard to put a price tag on that. It's sort of an infomercial that goes on for three hours a night for two nights in a row."

According to the AHL, the live television broadcast of the All-Star Classic, which is being produced by Service Electric TV Sports, will reach approximately 100 million households. The main event on Monday will be broadcast on over 20 regional networks partners across the United States and through all of Canada on Sportsnet ONE. Andrews said events will even be picked up in parts of Europe.

AHL Live is also offering free streaming video of the Classic worldwide.

"That's one of the reasons that we try to work so hard to get these things to come to the Lehigh Valley," Stershic said. "It's important, widespread exposure – it costs us what it costs us to get the game here but it's very valuable."

What helps the Classic get so much television coverage is there's not much competition. The NHL is holding its All-Star Game Sunday afternoon and there's no NHL action at all on Monday. It's the reason the AHL's Classic is scheduled with the skills competition Sunday night and the round-robin tournament Monday night, allowing for maximum exposure in the hockey world.

In addition to the television and streaming coverage, SiriusXM's NHL Network Radio will air Monday night's All-Star Challenge. Both Sunday and Monday's events can be heard locally on 790-WAEB and 1470-WSAN.

Competing in L.A.: Lehigh Valley Phantoms Youth players Elliott Puso, a forward, and Ryan Murphy, a goaltender, are in Los Angeles this weekend at the NHL All-Star Game.

The two were chosen out of the organization's two Atlantic Youth Hockey League teams to compete in the New Jersey Devils' Squirt Shootout Challenge this past Tuesday while the Devils hosted the Los Angeles Kings at the Prudential Center in Newark, NJ.

They didn't find out until just prior to hitting the ice but the winner of that night's challenge was headed to Los Angeles.

Puso and Murphy won and competed against 10 other sets of winners from select NHL clubs Friday night at 8 p.m. EST in the National Squirt Shootout Challenge.

In addition to both Puso and Murphy getting to take a parent along to the event they received an NHL All-Star package including tickets to the game and skills competition the two were given Devils gear and will greet a number of NHL players at a Saturday morning All-Star event.