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FORD IDAHO CENTER SEES BEST BUDGET YEAR SINCE 2008

NAMPA — The Ford Idaho Center's future looks brighter after new management cut the facility's deficit by \$450,721 in its first year, achieving its best operating budget in eight years.

This is the best operating budget the facility has seen since 2008, when there was no operating loss, according to Nampa Finance Director Vikki Chandler.

"What we came away with was a pretty satisfactory result," said Tim Savona, general manager of the Ford Idaho Center.

The Nampa-owned Ford Idaho Center, which includes a 9,800-capacity arena, 10,600-capacity amphitheater and 2,200-capacity horse park, has operated at a loss and has been subsidized by city taxpayers for most of its lifetime. The city made moves to dig itself out in recent years, with Ford's five-year, \$1 million sponsorship deal being announced in 2014 and awarding a contract for management to Philadelphia-based Spectra by Comcast Spectacor in 2015.

In 2016, the Ford Idaho Center's operating expenses amounted to \$3,491,284, and it brought in \$2,844,480 in revenue, according to Savona.

Spectra's contract with the city includes an incentive-based fee for financial performance. For 2016, Nampa will pay Spectra a bonus of approximately \$119,000.

Nampa Mayor Bob Henry called the bonus "a worthwhile investment" considering the improvement to the Ford Idaho Center's operating budget and the savings for city taxpayers. In a statement emailed to the Idaho Press-Tribune, Henry said the performance bonus is for "a job well done."

"The future of the Ford Idaho Center looks very bright," Henry said. "Tim Savona is a rising star and Spectra is a world-class operation. Keep in mind that Tim Savona and Spectra inherited the budget that its predecessor had developed, and there weren't a lot of revenue-generating events planned."

Savona said the Ford Idaho Center hosted almost 120 events over 237 event days from Oct. 1, 2015, to Sept. 30, 2016, the Ford Idaho Center's fiscal year. These events included Top 40 artist Meghan Trainor, comedian Ron White, rock show Korn/Rob Zombie, folk group The Avett Brothers, Vans Warped Tour and the ERA Rodeo.

The management company exceeded budgetary expectations, though the city will still have to make up for a loss. Pre-audit numbers show the operating budget for fiscal year 2016 finished with a deficit of \$646,804, while the estimate was a \$820,351 deficit. In FY 2015, the center's shortfall was \$1,097,525.

Savona credited the successful deficit cut to "being fiscally savvy by spending smart, growing value for our clients and customers, managing expenses and minimizing waste."

Of the changes made when Spectra took over last year, unifying the operations department was the biggest, Savona said. By combining operations of the horse park, arena and amphitheater under one umbrella, the center was run more efficiently.

The company created an events department and split the sales and marketing position into two jobs.

Additionally, the facility signed over \$100,000 in new sponsorship business.

Savona added that the surprising thing about the budget doing so well was the center didn't have the Professional Bull Riders on its 2016 fiscal calendar. PBR moved its annual April event to October, so this year's event actually goes on the FY 2017 budget.

The budget improvement is good news for the city of Nampa and Spectra, which came on when the nearly two-decades-old facility was operating at a deficit and the city was looking for ways to boost profitability.

Savona thinks the subsidy can be depleted over time, but it is hard to predict what obstacles at the facility, such as repair and replacements, may get in the way.

"I'm optimistic that we can grow on the success of the first year," Savona said. "And I feel like we have a really good thing going here and great support with the city and a great partnership with various departments within the city, parks and recreation and the Mayor's Office, and I think we can continue the trend."