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## **CONVENTION CENTER NUMBERS STRONG, FUTURE BRIGHT, MANAGER SAYS**

Since its gala grand opening in February of 2014, the Owensboro Convention Center has driven a total of 23,761 room-night visits to local hotels, which translates into direct spending in the community of \$40.7 million by those visitors to the city.

And in fiscal year 2015-16 alone, 110,000 people attended 268 events at the convention center, which generated 12,354 hotel room-nights and direct spending of almost \$15.1 million. Since it opened, a little less than 300,000 people have visited 692 events at the center

Those positive economic facts were included in a glowing report on the convention center's activities delivered on Tuesday to the Owensboro City Commission by Dean Dennis, manager of the city-owned convention center, at a commission work session at City Hall.

Dennis, who has been in charge of the convention center's operation since before it opened, thanked the commission for building it large enough to succeed and for supporting it throughout its first two and half years of operation.

"It's important to note that we would not have the impact we've had without your support to make the building the right size," Dennis said. "The impact numbers would not have been that great without that. You all did the right thing and the numbers bear that out."

The convention center is almost 170,000 square feet in size, enabling it to handle large conventions and shows thanks to a giant main exhibition hall that is 270 feet wide when all three sections are utilized at once.

Dennis said the center's focus is first on attracting multiple-day events such as conventions and conferences, followed by multiple-day public events such as consumer and trade shows, then on programming to compliment local events such festivals and Friday After 5, and finally on single-day events such as holiday banquets and parties, weddings and reunions.

"We really work hard to make the phone ring," Dennis said. "

Dennis said the center had a gross payroll of \$1.34 million during the fiscal year that just ended, for which the city received \$18,627 in occupational tax. The center spent \$4.55 million for goods and services, most of it with local local suppliers. During the 12-month period, 22 conventions were held at the center, which is 10 more than projected for the venue, while gross annual revenue of \$3.1 million, which is \$1.2 million more than was projected.

The city subsidy for the convention center for the 2015-16 year was \$158,000, which was almost \$35,000 less than anticipated.

"That's a heck of a return on that small investment," Mayor Ron Payne said, referring to the center's overall economic impact on the community. "I commend you on your approach and your attitude of working with everybody to make this work."

Dennis said the center achieved an average score of 4.75 on a scale of 5 for overall customer satisfaction, as measured by client surveys. The center has rebooked 186 events and had already booked \$1 million worth of business for the 2016-17 fiscal year before the year started.

"All the numbers look fantastic and 186 repeats is pretty strong," said Commissioner Jeff Sanford. "I can't brag on you too much."

"The future continues to look bright and we want to thank the city staff," Dennis said. "Anything we ever need, the city is always there for us."