

Spectra by Comcast Spectacor

By: Rebecca Goodman, Director of Public Relations

Cotton candy, Ferris wheels and winning stuffed animals are things that often come to mind when people think about fairs. But the team at Spectra by Comcast Spectacor looks at fairs a bit differently than most. To the sports and hospitality firm that provides venue management solutions to hundreds of professional sports arenas and other cultural venues across North America, fairs present an opportunity to blend art, commerce, and the celebration of vibrant regional flavors into a thriving business.

Spectra's VP of Business Development Nick Nicora has been a key figure in the fair industry for more than 30 years. Nicora, along with business partner Charlie Neary, divisional senior vice president with Spectra, started Fanfare in 1988. Comcast Spectacor acquired the company in 2001 with a vision to elevate fairs to an entirely new level.

"When we merged, that gave us a complete arsenal of opportunity for better management, better controls, better purchasing, better everything. Now, when you sign on as a client of Spectra, you're not just getting Nick and Charlie, you're getting a complete package in everything you could ever possibly want in a company. To me, that's what we offer when we walk into a venue as Spectra," stated Nicora.

Nicora brings with him the type of knowledge that you only attain by living the work. He believes that it takes the expertise along with the understanding of the heart and soul that goes into putting on a fair to make it successful. He used his Nonna's gravy recipe to exemplify this belief.

"You could take a recipe that I give you that my Nonna had for her gravy, and you're not going to make it like I would make it because what I have going into it are my Nonna's heart and soul," said Nicora.

As Nicora states, anyone can read a recipe and recreate it, but it takes a certain understanding and even some "heart and soul" to take a business such as a fair to the next level. He believes that what sets Spectra apart is how the Spectra team approaches each new fair they take on.

"We've grown in the fair industry by doing way more than just selling food and beverages. We truly come in and create environments. We understand what a fair is. We know that it is not about money; it's about the community spirit, about be-



ing a gem of the community and what the fair represents," stated Nicora. Part of that understanding is knowing the mission of most fairs.

"We understand that the mission for a fair is to educate and entertain fairgoers. We work with our clients to build their fairs around that core. That's how we've become a great partner to fairs across the country."

Food Services & Hospitality

Innovation is part of Spectra's DNA, which is why Spectra employees are continually working with their clients to develop new food concepts for their venues.

"If you bring a competitor of ours into a fair, odds are, it's not going to be what we bring to the table. Over the years, we have worked with our clients to create new concepts such as blues clubs, Hispanic gardens, sports bars, country western bars, and the list goes on," said Nicora.

Once a concept is developed, it is then recreated for fairgoers to enjoy in another Spectra managed fair. Nicora spoke of a time when he traveled to Ensenada, Mexico to learn how to make an original Mexican margarita from the owner of Cantina Hussongs. The trip spurred the idea to recreate Can-

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tina Hussongs restaurant at the Orange County Fair, Los Angeles County Fair, and the California State Fair, which has since been recreated at many Spectra-managed fairs. Another concept that the Spectra team created is Sliders Sportsbar.

“When we created Sliders, we created a great environment where we added giant television screens and put a goal post outside. Everything inside represented something sliding, whether it’s a skateboard or sliding into a base.”

In keeping with industry trends, Sliders has developed into a Farm to Fork restaurant called Sliders Gastropub, where the menu consists of locally sourced ingredients, including the bread and meat from nearby shops. Everything on the menu is cooked to order can be paired with a local craft brew.

Nicora says that working with each community is a top priority of the team. Every fair that is managed by Spectra includes locally sourced menu items.

Corporate Partnerships

Recently, Spectra’s relationship with fairs has grown. In addition to Larimer County Fair and Rodeo and Bangor State Fairgrounds, Spectra is now the exclusive sponsorship sales agency for the York Fair and State Fair of Virginia. As an industry leader in the medium of sponsorship sales, Spectra is applying the experience and knowledge they have gained across the many varied properties they represent to the fair industry.

Spectra’s Director of Business Development Nino Vanin believes that working with live event venues such as fairgrounds is a natural fit for their services.

“We are seeing that many fairs are looking to re-imagine and re-invigorate the ‘story’ of their respective fairs as well as the experience they provide their patrons. We believe a firm like ours, which has experience with large, high-level events and properties, can bring the fresh perspective that fairs are looking for. We have an excellent window into the industry and its positive attributes through our Food Services & Hospitality division,



which currently has 15 fair/fairgrounds clients,” stated Vanin.

Spectra is truly a turnkey service. They hire the director of corporate partnerships (in conjunction with the fair), who then works out of the fair offices and becomes a locally-based extension of the fair staff. They design the sales collateral, provide a market analysis, and comparison to similar properties in the region and across the country, provide an in-depth valuation of available sponsorship assets, and weekly reporting.

Spectra’s holistic approach to the sports and entertainment industry provides each of its divisions with a complete understanding of the fan experience, allowing the company to tailor their operations to be efficient, creative, and engaging. Currently, Spectra is providing food services and hospitality and corporate partnerships services to 18 fairs and fairgrounds. Both Nicora and Vanin spoke to the company’s entrepreneurial spirit, noting that it is ingrained in the culture to seek new opportunities to grow the business for their clients.

