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CASPER EVENTS CENTER DEAL OFF TO A STRONG START

Expectations were high when the Casper Events Center was privatized last fall.

City leaders said signing a contract with new operator Spectra Venue Management would alleviate the center's nearly \$1 million yearly loss. Beyond that, they said, it would help bring more popular acts to Casper.

The five-year agreement represented a huge change, and it had its share of skeptics. But now, less than a year later, it's clear that the predictions are already coming true.

Ticket sales are up 10 percent, almost halfway to Spectra's goal, according to general manager Brad Murphy. The company has also more than tripled the arena's corporate sponsorship since it took over. The deals make up \$285,000 in advertising revenue, Murphy said, and 75 percent of that is new business. That kind of progress directly addresses the annual deficit that had given city leaders headaches.

Prospective attendees also have a wider variety of acts to choose from – the Beach Boys, Elton John, Snoop Dogg and Eric Church have all taken the stage since Spectra took over, and a Foo Fighters concert is planned for December.

And Spectra officials aren't done. They have high ambitions: They want to increase the number of days the arena holds events from 200 to 220 and increase ticket sales by at least 20 percent.

They're also listening to the community and asking what they can do to improve the facility. Hearing complaints about the comfort of the seats, they are asking for about \$800,000 to pay for wider ones with more legroom.

And Spectra leaders are also becoming a voice in the community themselves. They're sending out strong warnings about buying tickets from resellers to ensure that potential concertgoers have the best experience possible at the Events Center.

After less than a year, the deal is off to a very strong start, and Casper and its residents are certainly among the beneficiaries. It looks as though the agreement could pay dividends for both sides for years into the future – and we certainly hope that's the case.