

Events



The first event of the year for the McEnery Convention Center and for South Hall was the San José International Auto Show. The Auto Show filled the fabric structure and the main Convention Center with hundreds of the latest cars, trucks, vans, sport utility vehicles, and concept cars.

Just add tents

Using tents to boost conference and trade show space improves revenues.

As cash- and time-strapped municipalities respond to the burgeoning demand for conference and trade show space, cities like San José, Calif., the capital of the Silicon Valley, have found that tent and fabric structure companies provide flexible semi-permanent spaces to cover trade shows exhibiting anything

from outdoor sporting goods to high-tech computer equipment. These exhibit halls are safe and comfortable alternatives to permanent buildings.

Jerry Vontress, facilities general manager at the McEnery Convention Center in San José needed to expand exhibit space quickly. Building a conventional structure was not an option with a nearby street blocking convention center expansion, and the necessary permitting and removal of part of the street a time-consuming matter. Vontress opted for a fabric structure that is expected to serve as an exhibit space for eight to 10 years.

The architectural firm that designed the project was Patri Merker Architects in San Francisco and the tensile fabric



The second show to occupy the new South Hall structure was Photonics, North America's largest commercial exhibition of optics, lasers, biomedical optics, optoelectronic components, and imaging technologies.

structure was manufactured by Universal Fabric Structures, Quakertown, Pa. It required minimal site preparation and “Gave us time to breathe while we were thinking about the permanent building,” says Vontress. Although the structure is not connected directly to the existing conference center, it is wired by means of underground fiber optic cables to provide telephone and internet service. A restroom building with permanent plumbing was built nearby. The new structure has opened the conference center to new markets that could not previously be serviced, such as automotive, boat, bicycle, and sports shows that desire an outdoor component to their exhibition.

At 131 feet wide by 607 feet long and standing 48 feet high at the center, the clearspan structure creates an additional 80,000 square feet of conference space and can accommodate about 480 10-

The new South Hall structure allowed each of these conventions to expand their exhibition space, which in turn had a positive impact on show attendance. The economic impact to San José for these three shows was significant—\$34.5 million.



The RSA Conference, the third major convention to utilize South Hall in 2006, is the world's leading information security event. The conference enjoyed record attendance at this year's show. RSA is a leading security company that created the basis for electronic security as it is known today.

person round tables, 376 10-by-10-foot booths, and 11,000 people in general session capacity. The double-layer vinyl fabric cover sandwiches an R30 insulation layer of fiber glass to help regulate temperatures. A sprinkler system and a fire and emergency announcement system has been installed and in the future Vontress says they will install a Bose sound system. Two suspension point areas on which to hang equipment, signage and lights makes it possible for exhibitors to set up their wares as they would in a permanent building.

The exhaust system can move 80,000 cubic feet of air per minute and air conditioning can be brought in to cool the structure.

March saw some of the highest revenues for 2006 and Vontress attributes this partly to the convention center's flexible, expanded space. Another benefit of the fabric structure is its close proximity to the Silicon Valley; it's the perfect place to have a high-tech show as customers are just miles away and San José is only 45 minutes south of San Francisco. —KH ▲

