

Upon arriving as the new director of Recreation and Parks for the City of Bakersfield, Calif., City Manager Alan Tandy expressed his excitement to me about a new park being built that would be the largest in the city. The park included a 7,000-seat amphitheater, among many other features. My specific goals were to secure naming rights for the amphitheater, and plan for a grand opening event at the park within the year.

Since I was new to Bakersfield and to the state, naming rights in public parks and facilities were foreign to me. California has been at the forefront of naming facilities and sponsorships, but I had no clue as to how to go about my task. Luckily, Tandy had already secured a slot for me to speak to the Chamber of Commerce and announce that we were looking for naming rights for the new amphitheater. After the speech that included my shameless plea for assistance, it became very public knowledge throughout the community that we were looking for a name to put on the amphitheater in the new park.

The sponsorship package that we developed in-house included several things that the park and recreation department could offer in return for the naming rights: a full page advertisement in our brochure which is mailed three times a year to 100,000 households, parking passes and reserved seats for city sponsored events, event shirts with their company name, and most importantly, every event would have their company name on it.

We included this information in a brochure that also listed major features of the park and the amphitheater, including a stage nearly surrounded by water with fountains in front of the stage, separating the audience from the performers with water.

The hardest part of the process was deciding on what price to set the nam-

ing rights. It was a question that had to be answered before the package and brochure were complete. But since this was a new facility, there was no history to rely on ... no story to tell about audience size and community response.

The city had to rely on two other local examples—the three-year-old aquatic center had been named after a local donor, and a city arena had just been remodeled with the naming rights selling for \$2.5 million dollars for 10 years to a bank that wanted more exposure in the community.

This decision was important to our success—we did not want to set the price too high and turn away prospective companies, but we did not want to undervalue what this amphitheater could become for the community. Using 10 percent of the overall construction costs of the park as a starting point, the packet's last page asked for \$1 million for 10 years, or \$600,000 for five years. The packet indicated that the money would be put into a special account, and used solely for community events at the park, allowing people to enjoy good entertainment for reasonable rates.

With the completed sales packet in hand, I began to meet potential sponsors on site even though it was still under construction. Some companies contacted me soon after the speech, and they wanted time to think about it, or work with their corporate offices. One local furniture company with a very good reputation in Bakersfield became very interested, but thought the price was too high.

After meeting with them on site and in their offices, their reply was in part, "We understand that having our name on the amphitheater at the Park at River Walk offers real value to us. However, we also believe, quite frankly, that our name offers as much value to the city to have us as a part of this new park. We work very hard at being good partners

HOW YOUR PUBLIC PARK CAN SECURE NAMING RIGHTS FOR FACILITIES.

By Dianne Hoover, CPRP

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN ENHANCING YOUR DEVELOPMENT OR OPERATIONS, CONSIDERING POLICIES FOR NAMING RIGHTS MAY PROVE TO BE BENEFICIAL.

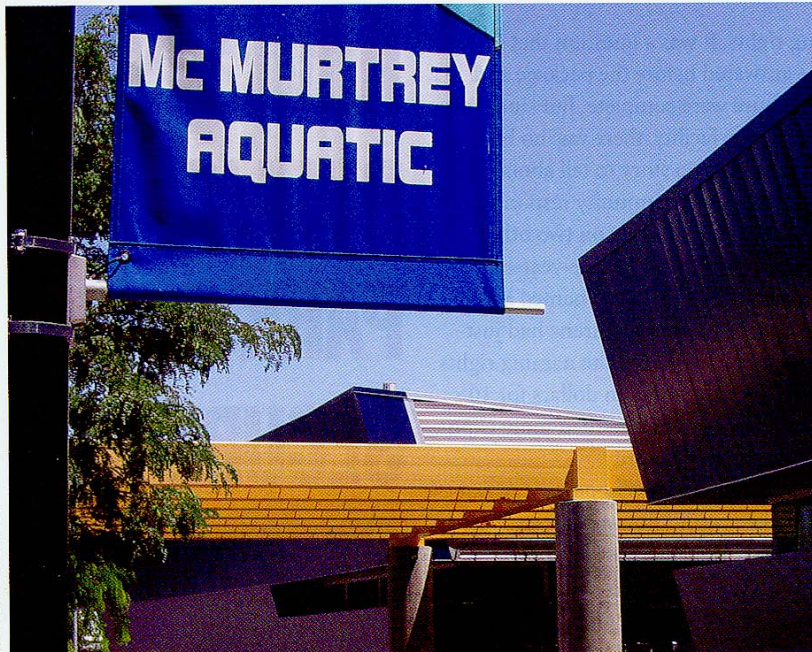


PHOTO BY BEGHER TAYLOR

Sponsored facilities in Bakersfield such as the McMurtrey Aquatic Center help defray cost by partnering with local businesses.

with all of our vendors and customers and provide a solid, quality image that any partnership, including this one with the City of Bakersfield, would benefit from.” With all that being said, they offered a quarter of what we had originally proposed. I kept looking.

After a few more missteps, like mispronouncing a local company name several times while meeting with them on site, and being rejected by larger companies, we finally hit our stride. Knowing that it usually takes time to go through corporate offices from local ones, we had patience in waiting for the right offer to come back.

Bright House Networks, a large cable company finally met our request. They were willing to contribute \$75,000 annually, and provide \$25,000 worth of advertising per year, for a total value of half a million for five years. And, they wanted right of first refusal for the following five years. This was before the park was completed and before the first concert was even booked at the amphitheater.

The mayor, city council and city manager celebrated the deal at a council meeting in December 2005 with a ceremonial signing of the contract and accolades to Bright House Networks. One council member indicated that it was a show of real support to the city from the business community, and Bright House was to be commended for taking a risk, and being a leader.

Joe Schoenstein, president, Bright House Networks, Bakersfield Division says, “When we saw the plans for the amphitheater and met with the City of Bakersfield Recreation and Parks Department, we knew that this facility would be a great venue for expanding the cultural and recreational opportunities for all Bakersfield residents. We are pleased to be able to partner with the city on this project. Bright House Networks is committed to giving back to the communities we serve.”

Grand opening weekend consisted of a Friday night free concert with the Fab Four (a Beatles cover band), children’s activities, art in the park, food vendors

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and plenty of local bands at the Bright House Networks Amphitheater throughout the weekend. It was attended by estimated crowds of more than 5,000 each day, with Friday night's concert exceeding 8,000. The weekend's events exceeded all projections, opening doors for future sponsorships and naming rights.

With the huge success of the grand opening weekend, companies wanted to know how they could be a part of the new park. We have already created a naming rights package for each of the seven pavilions in the park, and companies will be able to display a colorful banner on a flagpole next to the pavilion of their choice, again for a five- or 10-year agreement. The city will have the right to approve the banners, and the basic color scheme of the banners will be consistent throughout the park.

An adopt-a-bench program had been started before the park opened that allows individuals to buy a plaque commemorating a loved one. Interestingly, we had several requests for purchasing a plaque in honor of a beloved pet.

Other agencies have had similar success, and have clearly developed guidelines for naming rights. James Mann from St. Louis, Mo., indicated that their policy for Forest Park was a minimum of \$2 million through the life of the park for naming rights of any facility, and even with that donation, logos are kept to a minimum. By donating to a foundation, the company receives a huge tax write-off and they receive the benefits of donating to a well-received city cause.


In Cincinnati, Ohio, by municipal code, city council has to approve the naming of complexes or facilities. The Cincinnati Recreation Commission (CRC) has the right to name rooms, fields and other park features to recognize donors to either the CRC or the CRC Foundation. A recently built community center received a \$100,000 donation from a bank, and the gymnasium was named in honor of that donation. A multi-purpose room was named after a funeral home who donated

\$50,000 to the foundation. Both companies received tax write-offs for their contribution, and the good will that goes with having their name associated with a public venue each day.

The City of San Carlos, Calif., Parks and Recreation Department recently hired William Koegler of Oglebay Park to assist in developing an extensive Alternative Fund Development Program, with naming rights playing into the program. Barry Weiss of San Carlos recognized the benefits of having such a program for the future of parks in the community. "Private sector assistance can take us to greater heights than ever thought possible with traditional funding," he says. This approach has already become an integral part of the way business is done in the park and recreation department in San Carlos.

Koegler, in his work with Oglebay in Wheeling, W.Va., says that while in Wheeling, the civic center which holds sporting and special events (with seating for just 5,000) secured \$2.3 million over 10 years for naming rights. Wesbanco is a financial institution across the street from the arena. The president of the bank says he was "delighted because it was the best marketing program available to the company."

According to Koegler, the corporate naming rights phenomenon began in 1988, in California with the L.A. Lakers who played at the Forum. Great Western Bank paid \$1 million a year to place its name on the building, thus opening the door for professional and collegiate sports venues around the globe. It has reached into all sizes of communities ranging from small local parks to large civic centers.

If you are interested in enhancing your development or operations, considering policies for naming rights may prove to be beneficial to not only your department and the sponsoring company, but to the community as a whole. Setting a time limit for the naming rights provides flexibility in your negotiations, and allows decision-makers to be diligent in seeking successful business partners. 

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