

## **An Update from the Alliant Energy Center Executive Director, Brent McHenry**

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While “The Alliant Energy Center is a multipurpose facility for good times and bad times,” explains Alliant Energy Center’s Executive Director Brent McHenry. “I’m proud we have been able to offer the facility to support emergency response. It’s a testament to what this facility is for and how quickly it can be adapted to meet a wide range of community needs.”

For the last year, the Alliant Energy Center has been the hub of Dane County’s response to the pandemic and its repercussions. It continues to be a primary site for drive-through COVID-19 testing and vaccinations. It has provided a safe space for Second Harvest Food Bank to assemble and distribute food to many thousands of residents who would otherwise face hunger. It’s been used for education sessions such as nurse training. During warmer months it became the home of the Dane County Farmer’s Market and a place where folks could access food trucks.

While the Alliant Energy Center has been answering the call to support emergency and public health responses, it also has been busy preparing for when it will again be able to return to its pre-pandemic mission — to manage and operate first-rate venues for local, regional, national and international events and, consequently, provide significant economic and quality of life benefits to the Dane county community. McHenry says the Alliant Energy Center is anticipating a mid-summer reopening to welcome back clients and events. He says clients are excited to return, and many have already booked their events.

In preparation, the Alliant Energy Center has been very busy. A priority has been to earn GBAC STAR rating. GBAC stands for Global Biorisk Advisory Council, and the STAR rating is the gold standard in cleaning, sanitizing and controlling risks from infectious agents like COVID-19. To become accredited, facilities need to meet strenuous standards in 20 core areas, including cleaning, disinfection and infectious disease prevention programs and protocols, and staff education and training.

“It’s a big deal, especially for a facility that hosts everything from cattle shows to quilt events to large-scale concerts. It took three months to get this certification. It was a very arduous, and yet enjoyable process,” McHenry says.

When visitors return to the Alliant Energy Center, they’ll not only find surfaces sanitized but a state-of-the-art filtration system purifying air throughout the facility. The ionization system will clean the air as it frequently recirculates. McHenry says clients and visitors appreciate and expect this cutting-edge health protection technology.

Alliant Energy Center has also been streamlining processes to make it easier for clients to submit inquiries, book events and manage contracts. Event booking software has made the booking and contract process completely paperless and much more efficient. It also supports the environment since it eliminates the need for thousands of sheets of paper annually.

An automated lighting system has been installed that allows lights to be programmed or accessed through the touch of an electronic notebook or other device. The system saves money and supports the environment by limiting electricity usage. A new card access system for many facilities increases access and security.

Staff members who were furloughed during the height of the pandemic are returning to work and are busy making sure Alliant Energy Center is ready for business when Dane county begins reopening. And while

McHenry is laser focused now on getting ready to resume business in the coming months, he hasn't lost sight of long-term expansion plans for the Alliant Energy Center and has had an active role in beginning the process of searching for a development partner through a robust RFP (request for proposal) process to implement the redevelopment masterplan.

"First, we reopen successfully and then look at expansion," McHenry says. "We're making great strides." Everything Alliant Energy Center has put in place now and is planning supports its continued success and vibrancy.