

OCTOBER 2020 NEWSLETTER ARTICLE

NEW ALLIANT ENERGY CENTER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PIVOTS TO MEET CHANGING NEEDS

When we asked Brent McHenry, the new Executive Director of the Alliant Energy Center who took the position in April, to reflect on his first several months on the job, his first response was, “It has certainly been an interesting transition...” Undoubtedly, stepping in to lead a facility that has historically hosted hundreds of events annually and brought millions of people to the campus was bound to look different during a pandemic. McHenry noted, “I thought I’d be coming in putting my 25 years of event operations and marketing experience to work, but I’ve had to rely on a whole different set of skills and expertise.”

While the facility has been closed for the traditional uses of special events, trade shows, conferences and expos, it is bustling with new activities that are meeting critical needs for the community. Once events were cancelled and plans were put in place to support the work of Madison and Dane County Public Health, the National Guard and other emergency management systems, McHenry focused on preparing for a strong future for the Alliant Energy Center Campus. In addition to the more difficult work of staff reductions and other measures required to manage budgets, McHenry and his limited team began preparing the property for a time when it would be safe once again to gather.

“One positive thing we are trying to make from this time is the opportunity to pause and reset. You don’t often get the chance to pause during a normal schedule,” McHenry notes. “We’ve been using this period to do repairs, get inventory, and get the facility in great shape. We are streamlining processes as much as we can; evaluating practices and procedures and making adjustments, as necessary all while making sure we are available for the important community activities happening here.”

McHenry, who was most recently serving as the Director of Marketing for the Dane County Regional Airport, is no stranger to community collaboration. “I’ve worked and lived in this community most of my working life,” he said. “As COVID tapers down, I look forward to thinking collaboratively about how we can be in the best possible position to bring activities and events here that are meaningful to our community from an economic and social perspective.”

Looking ahead, McHenry notes the Master Plan for the campus redevelopment is exactly the next step the center needs to take, while acknowledging the timing and financing aspects will need to be the focus in the aftermath of a year with little to no revenue and other competing community priorities. “We need to proceed very carefully and thoughtfully and I’m confident with all of the dedicated people working on this, that is what we will do.”