

Benefit Concert Latest Feather in Cap for RFK Stadium

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Michael Jackson is coming to RFK Stadium Oct. 21 for a benefit concert to help the recovery effort for the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. And the king of pop is bringing along a host of performers that includes Ricky Martin, *NSync, Aerosmith and Mick Jagger.

Not a bad haul for a 39-year-old stadium whose main tenant packed up and left five years ago.

"Historically, there have been very few facilities like RFK that have been abandoned and kept open for any length of time," says Dean Bonham, CEO of Denver-based sports and entertainment marketing company The Bonham Group (www.bonham.com). "Even with a major league sports franchise it's difficult to make a stadium profitable. When you compound that with not having a major league franchise, it's almost a forgone conclusion that it's never going to be profitable."

But RFK (www.rfkstadium.com) seems to be beating the odds by not only surviving but thriving.

Bobby Goldwater, president of the D.C. Sports & Entertainment Commission, has led the fight to keep the lights on at RFK. And he's had a busy year: the National Grand Prix Le Mans race booked the stadium for 2002; a World Cup Qualifier sold out; *NSync and the two-day HFStival packed the stands; the Washington Freedom played its first soccer season; and RFK became the centerpiece of the 2012 Olympic bid.

"They are doing wonderful things with what is there," says Chris Dunlavey, president of Washington-based facility planner Brailsford & Dunlavey (www.facilityplanners.com). "RFK is not perfect for anything it does, but it's a great locale for a stadium. There are a couple highways that go by there. It's Metro-accessible, and the rent is lower than FedEx Field. All of that helps keep it going."

In addition, Dunlavey says RFK's steady client, D.C. United, and new client, Washington Freedom, have done a lot to help keep the stadium running.

Bringing events to RFK is vital to Washington's effort to bring baseball to the city, Bonham says.

"The ability to say you have a facility that a baseball team can play in while building a new facility is important," he says, "As long as that effort is ongoing, I think that it's a good likelihood RFK will be kept open."

In the meantime, Goldwater will be working to expose even more people to RFK. "Whether we're talking about bringing the Grand Prix or a concert or other sporting events to RFK, there is a benefit to economy for the District."