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Digging an arena event

Waves of officials, big crowd turn out

By Sheldon S. Shafer

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The Courier-Journal

There were so many officials on hand for yesterday's ceremonial groundbreaking for Louisville's downtown arena that it required five waves of shovel brigades.

But local and state officials said the shovel exchanges were symbolic of the many players required to bring the long-planned and often-derailed \$450 million project to fruition.

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One dignitary after another mounted a stage set up in a parking lot near the corner of Third and Main streets, where the arena will go, to praise the cooperative spirit that emerged earlier this year to solidify the project. And the speakers boasted to a sizable crowd that the arena will boost the local economy and the community's



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Maker's Mark CEO Bill Samuels Jr., far right, lofted a load of dirt yesterday as one of five groups of dignitaries breaking ground at the downtown arena site took its turn. To Samuels' right were University of Louisville athletic director Tom Jurich; Arena Authority Chairman Jim Host; Metro Councilman Kelly Downard; Lt. Gov. Steve Pence; and arena task force member Elaine "Cissy" Musselman. (By Arza Barnett, The Courier-Journal)

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"will reach across the entire commonwealth."

Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson said the arena wouldn't be a reality without so many interests "hanging together for so long."

Yesterday's shovel-turning notwithstanding, the first actual work at the site -- demolition of existing structures -- won't begin until spring, and construction won't start until mid-2008, said Jim Host, chairman of the Louisville Arena Authority.

The arena is scheduled to open in fall 2010.

Branden Klayko, an architectural intern who works downtown, was among about 400 onlookers yesterday. The arena "is definitely going to be good for downtown," he said.

Among the many groups of people recognized yesterday for their help were: the Louisville Metro Council; the Kentucky General Assembly; Greater Louisville Inc.; the Young Professionals Association of Louisville; the Kentucky State Fair Board; and the Louisville Arena Authority, along with an earlier arena task force appointed by Fletcher.

Special plaudits also went to the University of Louisville, whose basketball team will be the arena's prime user, and to Humana Inc. and E.On U.S., the two companies selling their property so the arena can be built.

Host said the authority expects to hire a design team in January for the complex, which will include retail and public space, a hotel, a restaurant and a parking garage.

The authority has hired the Texas-based PC Sports LLC to oversee the entire

pride.

For the \$75 million in bond money it's contributing, the state "is getting a world-class, multipurpose facility in a world-class city," said Gov. Ernie Fletcher, who received credit yesterday for his unflagging support of the project.

He said the arena will "put a new and appropriate face" on Louisville, while creating an economic spinoff that

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Reporter Sheldon S. Shafer can be reached at (502) 582-7089.

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The arena is a waste of money.
It could be better spent.

Posted: Wed Nov 29, 2006 9:55 am

Now the gouging of the taxpayer's pockets begins!

Its up to 450 million and by the time its over and paid for, this project will make the "big dig" look like an efficiently implemented undertaking.

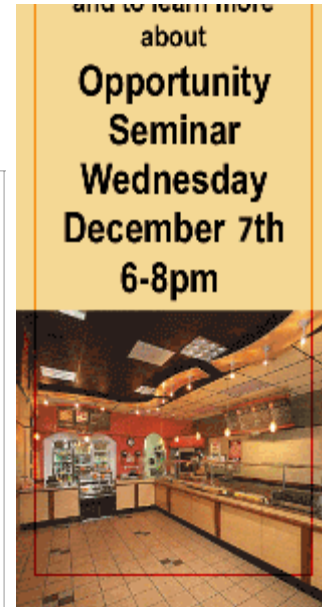
A project of this cost should well have been put to a vote by those that would end up paying for it, not crammed like a suppository by Jim Host and the other cronies on the committees. NO, Louisville, you will still NEVER get an NBA team, and we all know well that this is what this project is an end-run for, the UL basketball program was a ruse.

This project WILL help create more minimum wage jobs in the long run, but will help the owners of the restaurants and hotels out, so that's where the immediate payoffs are (read that however you wish!)

Yes, I am a UL grad and fan, and am still wondering why this was not put on campus or at the Fairgrounds, where parking and land were already available. Oh, I almost forgot, there would not have been enough graft and payoffs in that case (read that however you wish!)

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