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If We Build It, Will They Come?

Written By: Harry Gribnitz

When I first moved to Grand Rapids from Dallas in 1992, downtown Grand Rapids was a very quiet place in the evening. The first time I visited to interview with Amway, I stayed at the Amway Grand Hotel. The hotel was beautiful, but walking around the downtown that first crisp, February evening, the city appeared abandoned. Even after I completed my relocation to Michigan, if I wanted to see a hockey game I traveled to Muskegon or Kalamazoo. Concerts required a trip to one of those cities, Battle Creek, Lansing or even Detroit or Chicago.

After having lived in Grand Rapids for a couple of years, I had resigned myself to traveling for sports or entertainment events. One evening I opened the Grand Rapids Press and spotted an advertisement with a small coupon. If we built an arena and started a minor league hockey team, would you buy season tickets? I had always dreamed of owning Blackhawks' season tickets (sorry Red Wings' fans). Even though it was at a point in my life that I had no idea how I would actually pay for season tickets, I filled out the coupon and sent it to the designated address.

The financing and building process continued until the \$75,000,000 Van Andel Arena opened on October 8, 1996. A few days later the first puck was dropped to inaugurate the Grand Rapids Griffins first IHL season. The little coupon I had sent in the mail gave me a place in line to purchase Griffin's Season tickets and Arena seat leases. Using all my engineering skills, I carefully selected two seats in Section 109. They were just high enough and in front of the end stage to be perfect for concerts. Even if the concert had a center stage, I was equidistant to the stage (I knew those years in engineering school would payoff). For hockey, I had a great view, since I was almost directly across from the Griffin's bench but not obstructed by the penalty box.

From my seats in Section 109, I have had the pleasure of see an incredible range of events. From Neil Diamond to Kenny Chesney; From Shania Twain to Ted Nugent; From the Griffins' three overtime playoff game to Arena Bowl XV; From Tim and Faith to Kiss and Cher.; From Disney on Ice to NCCA Regional Hockey: From Michael W. Smith to Kid Rock; From Martina McBride to Motley Crew. All of this with Brooks and Dunn, Reba, Rod Stewart, The Who, Elton John, John Mellencamp, Aerosmith, Michael Bolton, ZZ Top, Prince, Phil Collins and even a little Bull Riding thrown in.

But it is really not about the events, it is really about the wonderful friends I have had the opportunity to enjoy. The arena has become the focal point for the reinvigoration of downtown Grand Rapids. If you walk around downtown GR on an event evening you will stroll by a myriad of restaurant choices and throngs of Michiganders enjoying their friends and family. Every time I go to an event with friends or on my own, my family is always with me in my heart. If you check out the "bricks" near the entrance you will find one engraved with Janet and Jim Gribnitz, Irving, Texas. It is in Section "S" Row "1". If you still can't locate the brick, it is halfway between the basketball player (for my daughter the athlete) and the musician (for my son the singer and musician).

*I would now like to offer you my clients and friends the opportunity to sit in my seats to enjoy an event!!!!
Please read the information on the back of this letter very carefully!!!!!!*

Thanks,

Harry Gribnitz

Your Home Loan Specialist for Life!