

# BLADES

From page 1

crowd backed up traffic on Interstate 75, Germain Arena has hosted 2,304,431 fans in 358 regular season games, an average of 6,437 fans per game. Centrally located off exit 123 in Estero, it draws crowds from all over Southwest Florida.

"Germain Arena is one of the diamonds in our own backyard," said Mike Reagan, president and CEO of the Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce. "It is an incredible gathering place for all the segments of our society. The dollars spent there circulate around our community and the surrounding five counties."

Yet, ticket sales slipped this year due to the bad economy, said Everblade's Director of Marketing Ethan May, but not much.

"Just like everybody else, we're a little bit slow, but we had a lot of success selling sponsorships and group tickets," he said. "I think we're competing for that entertainment dollar. Our least expensive ticket is the same price as a movie ticket."

Tickets start at \$10.

Everblades Account Executive Butch Hildebrand, who works to sell group tickets to places like schools, boy scout clubs or church groups, said "Luckily, we are winning, so that helps."

The team splits 36 regular season games between home and on the road. When they're not playing at home, Germain Arena is transformed overnight to host events like the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus (Jan. 16-19), rock concerts, trade shows and other events. Meanwhile, the team travels on a sleeper bus with 25 bunks. Their shortest trip is 583 miles to Charleston, S.C.

"They play cards and watch movies," Coach Cameron said. "And you're playing so many games, so the guys sleep a lot."

They also surf the Internet and check e-mails on the road.

Earlier this year, a 19-day road trip began as it always does, at Germain, where the bus headed to Augusta, Ga.; Reading, Pa.; Trenton, N.J.; Johnstown, Pa.; Ithaca, N.Y.; Elmira, N.Y.; then back to Trenton and Reading. Usually they take the bus home, but after such a long journey, they flew back from Philadelphia.

Coach Cameron misses his wife and two sons while traveling, but said the trips keep the team focused because there are few distractions.

"When you're on the road, it's all hockey," he said. "It's hotels and hockey."

While the players travel, Mr. May works with his sales team to sell tickets and promote upcoming games.

"Everyone here," Mr. May said, "from our broadcaster (Kevin Reiter) to our other sales guys, have to make sure when they get back there's a nice big crowd to watch the game."

Last Saturday night was game 17 at home, against the Mississippi Sea-wolves, only one game to the official midseason point.

"We're right in the thick of things," Mr. May said. "All-Star breaks are right around the corner."

There are more promotions to keep attendance up this year, like the FANTASTIC Friday Four-Pack: four hot dogs, four sodas and four tickets for \$44, Mr. Ethan said. People who bought tickets at Germain Arena or through Ticketmaster might be sent e-mail blasts telling them about the special promotions.

"Once people come in and see the game, you start creating those memories," Mr. May said. "You hope they have a smile on their face when they leave the building."

It takes a staff of 80 to 100, plus concession workers and a Lee County Sheriff's Office presence, to make the production of each game run smoothly. That includes 19 parking attendants, who charge \$5 to park and direct you to a space; and 38 ushers, like Bruce Pegrum. The former high school hockey coach, now 74, calls himself a "snowbird" who lives in Michigan six months out of the year. He generally takes care of fans who sit in section 109/110 at Germain.

"Sometimes if they get a little noisy we try to cool 'em down," he said.

That's usually not necessary, because the ice itself is cooled to 17 degrees Fahrenheit, which makes the arena chilly. That doesn't hurt sales for Pro Shop, said Sales Associate Ed Ricci, 70, a New Jersey native who moved to Florida with his wife 18 years ago. He has been selling Everblades apparel and memorabilia at games since Germain Arena was built in 1998.

"Because of the atmosphere inside we sell a lot of sweatshirts and ball caps," he said.

He sets up on folding tables for the legions of fans who pour through the front entrance before a game. They can also visit the fully stocked Pro Shop in another part of the stadium.

Those looking for dinner might try The Big Cypress Club, tucked in next to food and drink vendors of all kinds — hot dogs, sausages, Cuban sandwiches, sorbet and pretzels are a few examples. The Cypress Club serves a buffet for members before the games, for \$19.95 or \$12.95 with just salad and dessert. Last Saturday night's offerings included Prime Rib and smoked Gouda casserole.

To eat and drink while watching the game, fans can also crowd into the Breakaway Sports Club, on the arena's upper rim, near one of the rented suites where the team's President Craig Brush often watches the games.

Mr. Brush, who built Germain Arena with partners Peter Karmanos (owner of the Carolina Hurricanes) and Tom Thewes, expects the Everglades just might go all the way this year. They've come close before.

"A lot of great things have happened at the arena over the last 10 years, but there is still one big check mark yet to be made on the to-do list," he wrote in a guest column for the Naples Daily News in November. "We have to get that Kelly Cup. This year's team has all the ingredients to accomplish that goal — a driven coach, All-Star talent and a great work ethic."

Not to mention the fans who show up on game day. ■

# Physician of the Month-December 2008

**The Staff and Administration of Lee Memorial Health System is pleased to announce the Physician of the Month**



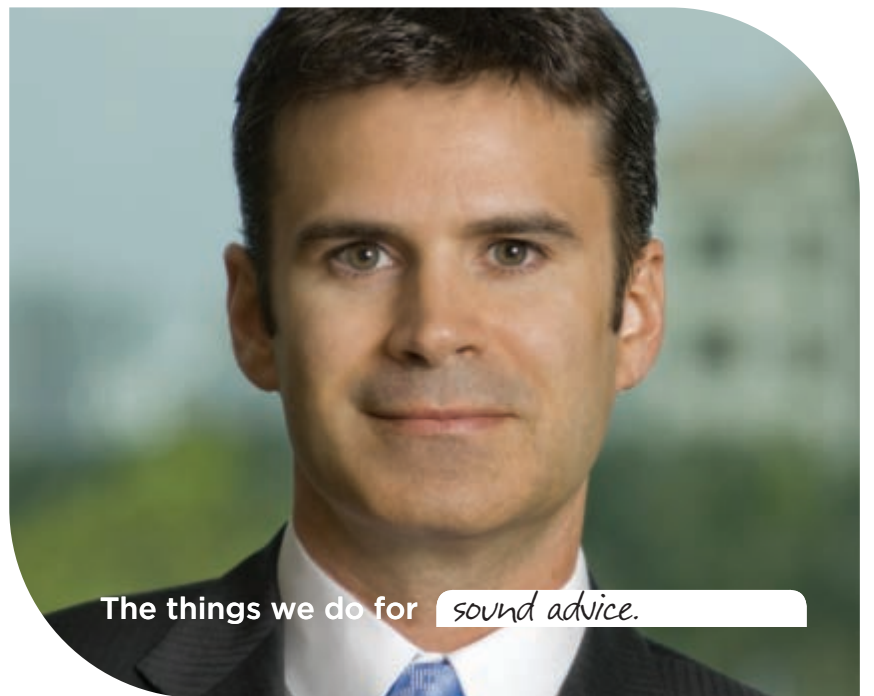
**John H. Bellew, M.D.**  
Emergency Medicine

The Staff and Administration of Lee Memorial Health System are pleased to announce John H. Bellew, M.D., as Physician of the Month for December 2008.

The physician is chosen through nominations from employees, volunteers and other physicians on staff based on criteria such as consistent quality, attitude, professionalism, compassion and going "above and beyond" what is reasonably expected. Each month the team will award a Physician of the Month.

We salute Dr. Bellew for exemplifying the qualities of an excellent physician and we are privileged to have had Dr. Bellew as a respected member of our medical staff since September 1990.

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