



Juneau's Convention Center Embraced by Capital City Residents

by Aleta Walther

Whereas locals avoid the LVCC during the Consumer Electronics Show or San Diego Convention Center during Comic Con, Juneau residents embrace events hosted at their convention center. Yes, Alaska's capital city of about 32,000 residents has a convention center that offers 18,000 square feet of exhibit space, encompassing four meeting rooms and a ballroom with a stage and room to host 115 10x10 booths. Although petite, Juneau's Centennial Hall Convention and Civic Center is innately more community centric than many mega convention centers.

Owned by the City of Juneau and managed by the Juneau Arts and Humanities Council (JAHC), the con-

vention center hosted 143 events during its last fiscal year, including corporate and association conferences, concerts, banquets and other cultural events. The JCCC is also home to "Celebration," a multi-day event and the second-largest gathering of Southeast Alaska Native people. According to the Sealaska Heritage Institute website, Celebration attracts about 5,000 participants during its biennial gathering and generates an economic impact of about \$2 million. Larger public events, by JCCC's standards, include music festivals, a public market and a Christmas bazaar.

"Centennial Hall is the largest open plan events venue in Juneau," says Kathleen Harper, house manager for the

JCCC. "We work to attract events from across the U.S., even worldwide, to experience what Juneau has to offer; a wonderful small town with a big city heart, as well as the awe-inspiring natural beauty of Alaska."

If a convention or conference requires more area than offered by JCCC, additional floor space is available at the JAHC complex adjacent to Centennial Hall.

Harper adds that the partnership between the convention center and arts and humanities council also strives to serve the community by offering events and activities that attract locals as well as visitors. In July, nine-time Grammy Award winner Norah Jones dropped into Juneau for one sold-out concert at the JCCC. The two entities also host weekly or monthly swing and ballroom dances, art shows and pickleball tournaments. Rock Around the Block parties, held Friday evenings during the summer, attract locals and cruise ship passengers. About 500 cruise ships will drop anchor in Juneau this year with 1.3 million passengers aboard. In fact, specialty cruise lines such as Un-Cruise use JCCC's meeting rooms as hospitality suites during multi-day stopovers in Juneau.

"Centennial Hall tends to be more of a venue for annual events," Harper adds. "Many nonprofits in town host large fundraising banquets at the hall each year. The Folk Festival and Juneau Jazz and Classics use both the JAHC (venue) and Cen-

ennial Hall for their annual music festivals."

Having spent five summers in Juneau, this writer can attest that although the JCCC is small by lower-48 convention center standards, Juneau's mountain landscape looms large above Centennial Hall, and that alone leaves convention, conference and event attendees in slack-jawed astonishment.

After sitting in a class or standing at an exhibit all day, conference and meeting attendees have an array of options for fun, food and brew, all just minutes from the convention center. Juneau offers a variety of food trucks, fine dining and, of course, fresh fish and crab venues. Alaskan brewed beers are on tap at all downtown drinking establishments, including the historic Red Dog Saloon and the Alaskan Hotel and Bar, both throwbacks to Juneau's gold rush and mining heydays.

Juneau also offers a plethora of free or low-cost activities and adventures. The city's waterfront boardwalk offers spectacular views of cloud-shrouded mountains and the Gastineau Channel. Memorials, statues and placards along the boardwalk and throughout downtown offer a glimpse into Juneau's eclectic past and present. Free tours of the state capital are available during the week. Across from the capital are the Alaska State office building and the Juneau Douglas City Museum. The state office building offers an eight-story high viewing deck overlooking downtown Juneau. Not free, but only \$6 for admission, the Juneau Douglas City Museum high-

lights the area's Alaska Native and gold mining histories. Just around the corner from the City Museum is the Governor's mansion. For more athletic and/or outdoor-loving visitors, Juneau offers 300 miles of walking and hiking trails with access to nature just minutes from downtown.

More costly, but understandably so, are opportunities to go whale watching, sled dog mushing, sight seeing, glacier trekking, gold panning, sport fishing, guide-led hiking and city tours. For \$18, one can meander through the delightful Alaska State Museum and Archives just across the street from the JCCC.

Juneau's number one attraction is the Menden-

hall Recreation Area visitor center with its majestic Mendenhall Glacier and roaring Nugget Creek Falls. In late July, sockeye salmon spawn in nearby Steep Creek and soon after, black bears arrive to gorge on the brilliantly red fish. Located about 13 miles from downtown, a variety of transportation options are available to whisk visitors to the visitor center.

The city offers a variety of downtown hotels, motels and bed and breakfast options, including three within a block of the JCCC; Four Points by Sheraton, Ramada by Wyndham and Driftwood Hotel. The Juneau Hotel and the historic Alaskan and Baranoff

hotels are an easy stroll from the JCCC.

"Juneau really is a place like no other," says Harper. "People are often enchanted by the natural beauty they can see even when walking through the heart of downtown. We love our city and want to show it off to everyone who comes. Centennial Hall's staff embodies that spirit and we work to make each event a success." TM

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CENTENNIAL HALL CONVENTION AND CIVIC CENTER FACILITY SPECIFICATIONS

Exhibit Space:

14,285 sq. ft.

Rental Fee:

\$530-\$1,320 per day

Parking Available:

400 spaces

Seating Capacity

Theater: 432

Banquet: 690

Classroom: 276

Exhibit Hall Entry Doors:

12 x 12 feet

Ceiling Height: 25 feet

Floor Load: 300 lbs./sq.ft.



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