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Saugerties-based HITS lands events contract for NY State Fairgrounds and its new Exposition Center

Saugerties-based company gets contract to book events at new Exposition Center

By William J. Kemble, news@freemanonline.com with wire reports

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SAUGERTIES, N.Y. >> Saugerties-based Horse Shows in the Sun has been awarded the contract to book major events at the new Exposition Center on the New York State Fairgrounds, as well as in other buildings at the site.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo said HITS Inc. won the open bidding by providing a unique plan to attract a variety of events to the site near Syracuse.

“We received a five-year contract with the state to be in charge of booking the fairgrounds for 50 weeks of the year,” HITS Chief Executive Officer Tom Struzzi said Tuesday. “So that would be everything but the two weeks of the fair [in late summer] ... and the

centerpiece of that would be the new Expo Center that’s under construction and scheduled to be finished the first of August.”

Struzzi, who moved his horse show headquarters to Saugerties in 1998, also has facilities in California, Florida, Arizona, Illinois and Virginia. He said HITS’ wide range of experience with events across the nation was part of the reason his bid to the state was attractive.

“We run ... facilities around the country that we rent out to all kinds of events, so we’ve shown the breadth of our ability that way,” he said. “We’re a New York company, and they saw that we can multitask.”

Struzzi noted that Coachella, a huge music festival held each spring in Indio, Calif., is staged on a HITS property.

The new Expo Center is part of the state’s ongoing \$120 million plan to improve the fairgrounds. The facility features 4,000 retractable seats and room for 500 exhibit booths. It’s designed to host car, boat, trade and home and garden shows, as well as pet and tech expos, and Struzzi said it could easily interface with activities in other sections of the fairgrounds.

“There are some beautiful old buildings,” Struzzi said. “One building is 90,000 square feet, and some other old buildings that are just fabulous. So we can be pretty creative with as diverse events as you might like. ... I think the state wants us to be pretty aggressive in marketing the space.”

The state press release announcing the contract with HITS said at least nine events—including a fall festival, a drone-racing competition and a log home expo—have been booked so far for the Expo Center for dates in 2018 and 2019, with five existing shows planning to expand into the new building next year.

Under the contract, HITS is required to book at least 12 new multiday events in the Expo Center by the end of 2020 — with at least three using other fairgrounds buildings as well — and at least five new multiday events in

fairgrounds buildings other than the Expo Center. And the events must not have been held at the fairgrounds during the previous 18 months.

Struzzieri said he plans to have the HITS national championship at the fairgrounds, “but I don’t think we’ll do too many horse shows” there.

The state Department of Agriculture and Markets in December 2017 sought proposals to market the fairgrounds and position the new Expo Center as a year-round venue. HITS’ promotion and management of the Expo Center is expected to complement Central New York Rising, a regional strategy to grow the economy by investing in tourism.

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