



Super Celebration site turnout less than expected

Scott Olson February 7, 2012

From Lafayette to Bloomington, communities within a reasonable driving distance of downtown Indianapolis hoped to cash in on Super Bowl visitor spending by offering football fans free bus service.

Many of those cities and even neighborhoods within Indianapolis say the [sponsored shuttles](#) saw plenty of riders, but they appeared to be more popular with local residents traveling to downtown Indianapolis than visitors venturing to the outlying communities.

As one of 20 designated Super Celebration sites, Shelbyville thought its Indiana Live casino would lure away some of the thousands of visitors who packed downtown Indianapolis last week, but the city received a boost from an unlikely source: the lowly Cleveland Browns, a team that finished last in its division with a 4-12 record.

As part of the overall Super Bowl celebration, 33 Indy race cars were dressed up in National Football League team colors and put on display at celebration sites as part of the effort to attract visitors. Shelbyville drew the Browns, which turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Word spread into nearby Ohio, prompting “a ton” of the team’s fans to make the trip to the town,” said Rachael Ackley, executive director of the Shelby County Tourism and Visitors Bureau.

“I know that was the main concept, to pull people from out of downtown [Indianapolis], but I had a lot of people from Cincinnati and Dayton getting on the bus to go downtown,” she said. “I have no problem with that.”

The free shuttle that ran to Shelbyville on Friday and Saturday had “less than expected” ridership, Ackley acknowledged. Knowing the casino wouldn’t appeal to families, she understood the limited interest.

“If we got 10 people, I thought it would be of benefit,” Ackley said. “To be honest, if you’re going to fly into Indianapolis, you’re going to want to see what’s going on downtown.”

To the north of Indianapolis, in Hamilton County, ridership on shuttles to and from Carmel, Noblesville and Fishers was strong, but suburban residents traveling downtown likely made up 75 percent of the ridership, said Karen Radcliffe, deputy director of the Hamilton County Convention & Visitors Bureau.

At the historic Fishers Train Center, where the Fishers Convention and Visitors Bureau is located, the Cincinnati Bengals Indy car attracted about 50 visitors a day. By comparison, the center might attract only four or five visitors on a typical day in February, she said.

“Rather than see the big numbers like downtown did, we saw pockets of great success, and our hotels were filled,” Radcliffe said. “We knew [the shuttles] were going to be heavily traveled with residents

from the communities.”

Clay Terrace and the Palladium were featured stops in Carmel. In addition, shuttles traveled to Conner Prairie in Fishers and Hamilton Town Center in Noblesville.

Mini-shuttles taking visitors to restaurants along the 96th Street corridor were less busy, Radcliffe said. But eateries near hotels, such as Peterson’s Restaurant near Interstate 69, had its best week of sales ever, she noted.

“It’s not an impact like we would get from an event at Crooked Stick [Golf Club], because that happens right in our neighborhood,” Radcliffe said. “But absolutely, the Super Bowl was a great event for the north side of Indianapolis and Hamilton County.

Radcliffe also chaired the Super Celebration Sites Committee for the Super Bowl Host Committee and reported strong shuttle ridership in Greenwood and Plainfield.

The shuttle stopped at the Metropolis mall in Plainfield and moved about 1,500 people in two days, said Jaime Bohler Smith, associate director of the Hendricks County Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Most of the Metropolis visitors came from Martinsville, Putnam County and even farther west in Terre Haute to catch a ride downtown, she said, which is what the local visitors bureau originally intended.

“Let them go downtown and experience the fun and let them come back and have their evening in Plainfield,” Bohler Smith said.

Neighborhoods within Indianapolis said they received fewer visitors than expected.

Massachusetts Avenue, Fountain Square and Broad Ripple all were Super Celebration sites and saw mixed results from their participation. Most restaurateurs attributed lower-than-expected sales to the unseasonably warm weather that kept most visitors downtown at or near Super Bowl Village.

The Sun King Brewery along North College Avenue was among those that prepared for an onslaught that never occurred. The brewery's 500-person tent hit capacity a few times thanks to loyal local patrons who turned out in force, Sun King spokesman Neal Taflinger said.

“If there can be a complaint about the whole Super Bowl experience, and I’m not sure there can be,” he said, “it’s that the Super Bowl Host Committee and the downtown [village] worked too well.”