

Dane County Executive Joe Parisi: Dane County awarded \$3.2 million state tourism grant to fund Alliant Energy Center upgrades, promote economic recovery

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Today, County Executive Joe Parisi announced Dane County will receive \$3.2 million in funds from the State of Wisconsin's Tourism Capital Grant Program to upgrade facilities at the Alliant Energy Center and help restore economic activity negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Alliant Energy Center will use the grant to fund a significant physical plant upgrade to provide heating, cooling, and electrical to serve the year-round needs of cattle, horse, and other animal shows—which have distinct requirements for care, grooming, assessment, showing, and housing.

Livestock and agricultural events at the Alliant Energy Center generate more than 70,000 hotel room nights, 100,000 visitors/guests, and an average of \$16 million in annual direct spending per year. The ability to host organizations for a full calendar year will significantly increase tourism to the State of Wisconsin, Dane County, and the City of Madison. In addition, this added exposure will help market Wisconsin as the premier host for agribusiness shows across the country.

“Dane County's Alliant Energy Center is a key driver of the state and local economy, providing a world-class entertainment campus for countless shows and exhibitions each year,” said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. “Thanks to the creation of this statewide grant program, the Alliant Energy Center will be able to make necessary upgrades and continue to safely host top events, as our community rebounds from the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Dane County's Alliant Energy Center is home to several resident organizations, including World Dairy Expo, Midwest Horse Fair, and other annual agriculture and animal shows. Due to the exceptional first-class facilities of the New Holland Pavilions and onsite 100-spot full-service camping area, national and international touring livestock shows continue to return year after year.

With this increase of usage and demand for additional show dates, the New Holland Pavilions are in demand nearly 10-months a year, despite lacking the heating and cooling amenities that attendees would prefer during warm and cold months. This speaks volumes to the quality, innovation, ease, and affordability of these Class-A facilities.

The expansion and necessity of improved animal care and grooming techniques require substantial electrical needs not originally designed into the footprint of the buildings. Currently, these show spaces are usable approximately 260 days per year with an average occupancy of 76%. Many of the unusable days are for set-up, ingress, egress, and turnover to the next event, as well as weather-related factors.

Specifically, the project will include the addition of more than 600 in-install electrical receptacles, radiant and forced air heating equipment, physical plant power distribution improvements, fan/cooling/air movement equipment, a dry-chemical fire suppression system to protect storage areas for bedding, food, tack, and equipment, and upgraded air filtration equipment. Providing these necessary upgrades will allow the Alliant Energy Center to attract additional tours and guests in months typically considered off-limits due to weather.

COVID-19 significantly affected the agricultural community as well as the live event and exhibit business in Wisconsin and around the world. Every event scheduled after March 15, 2020, as well as more than 50% of all events scheduled in 2021 were cancelled at the Alliant Energy Center. The community and organizations that use the New Holland Pavilions were devastated by the pandemic financially, operationally, and logistically. Important world-wide and regional agricultural consortiums at the Alliant Energy Center were cancelled, hampering the ability for these groups to convene and collaborate to develop recovery plans.

The new enhancements at the Alliant Energy Center will expand the opportunities for these essential organizations to collaborate face-to-face, despite weather implications that have in the past discouraged the use of these facilities in Wisconsin. Additional occupancy dates will also provide the Center with the ability

to host additional events and experiences such as sporting competitions, exhibitions, tradeshows, seminars, trainings, and consumer shows focused at enhancing the quality of life for Dane County residents.

Dane County anticipates that these additional amenities and booking opportunities will generate new business of 1 large (2 pavilions/camping in use), 3 medium (1 pavilion/camping in use), and 1 (pavilion only in use) small additional livestock shows per year. These additions will expand visitor attendance to Dane County and Wisconsin by approximately 10,000 additional visitors, 400 hotel nights, and direct spending of \$2 million to \$5 million based on the type of event. An occupancy availability increase from 260 days to 300 days (excluding holidays, maintenance days, and overlapping event days) with even 75% average usage would directly influence the financial success of the Alliant Energy Center.

Dane County estimates the heating, cooling, and electrical upgrades can be completed in approximately one year from the date of the grant award, while working around the schedule of contracted events in the spaces.