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Amp'd Up for a Comeback

Black Oak Mountain Amphitheater stakes Season 2 on a \$1 million makeover

**Ed Peaco
Contributing Writer**

After a painful reopening year for Black Oak Mountain Amphitheater in Lampe, CEO Deborah Hansen is staking this season on a new marketing strategy and a high-profile kickoff concert with Lynyrd Skynyrd and ZZ Top on May 27.

VIP memberships, bistro seating, tiered seating and a corporate box are designed to satisfy fans' preferences and enhance revenue, Hansen said. A ticket building and a VIP hospitality pavilion also are new this year, she said, adding to the extensive renovations completed before the 2010 season – an ongoing commitment exceeding \$1 million so far.

With the Lynyrd Skynyrd and ZZ Top concert, Hansen said she intends to make her mark not only with customers but also with booking agencies. The concert, the cost for which she declined to disclose, is verging on a sellout, she said.

Last year, Black Oak's best-attended concert was Foreigner, Styx and Kansas, during the July 4 weekend, drawing roughly 3,500 people at the venue, which seats 5,819 with room for another 2,000 on the lawn. Such numbers will not satisfy agencies, she said.

"They've put it to me, 'Prove it to us, Debbie. Can you guys do this? Will people come to this amphitheater?' And, when we can prove it to them, I think then they'll start listening to us."

Taking ownership and taking charge

Hansen and her father, Garland Pierce, got into the concert business in 2009 with no experience. She worked in various business roles, including sales coordinator, at her father's Toyota Lift dealership in California, then devoted 17 years to raising her family. Her father bought the property southwest of Branson on a whim in 2009, she said, a time when the venue was a fixer-upper. It had been dormant for nearly a decade and endured a fire in 2007. They decided to reopen it and run it themselves. When they faced quizzical inquiries about their decision, she said they replied, "We don't know anything about this, but it doesn't mean we can't do it."

Pierce rebuilt the burned-out stage and green room, replaced the looted seating and added a mini-amphitheater for entertaining early arrivals. Seeking expertise for the 2010 reopening, Pierce hired industry veterans as



Deb Hansen, CEO of Black Oak Mountain Amphitheater, is welcoming Lynyrd Skynyrd and ZZ Top to kick off the 2011 season.



Black Oak Mountain Amphitheater employees Logan King, left, and Justin Strait work on improvements to the ticket office.

Black Oak Mountain Amphitheater

Owner: Garland Pierce
Founded: 1996
Address: 1728 State Highway H, Lampe, MO 65681
Phone: (417) 779-1222
Web: www.blkoakamp.com
E-mail: dhansen@blkoakamp.com
Services: Outdoor concerts
Employees: 7; 40 to 50 contracted

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

booking agent and manager. However, the business quickly slumped into disarray, with low attendance and disagreements over spending priorities, Hansen said. In midseason, she arrived to become CEO, fired the two new staffers and took full control of operations, she said. The season ended with a loss of nearly \$1 million.

The marketing plan for 2011, which includes regional radio and print ads, is based on a menu of seating options and experiences. The \$99 VIP season membership is nearly sold out, offering 150 members access to the hospitality pavilion, stage, artist meet-and-greet, premium parking and 48-hour advance tickets. Seating options range from a \$20 general admission on the lawn to \$82 for platinum seats in the first six rows. The venue also offers bistro seating for \$175 for two seats and a table. As of May 11, the corporate box, lawn, platinum and bistro seating were sold out for the Lynyrd Skynyrd and ZZ Top show, Hansen said.

The economy of sound

Small music venues face a difficult economy with rising costs of talent and production, one Ozarks-based entertainment industry executive observed. Black Oak is making the right decisions to meet this challenge, said Mark Sparks, a Humansville resident who is a vice president with Louisville, Ky.-based Triangle Talent.

After a review of Black Oak's Web site, Sparks said he was impressed with the platinum and bistro options, along with general admission, for the Lynyrd Skynyrd-ZZ Top concert.

"They're doing things pretty smartly, I think," Sparks said. "Industrywide, when offered, these VIP packages tend to sell out first."

He suggested a magnitude of "typically six figures" for the cost of the Skynyrd and ZZ Top concert, which he said his company has experience booking.

Hansen said she's not making any predictions for 2011. "I don't have a projection number, but I do know that we will make a profit," she said.

She pointed to signs of a turnaround and shrugged off the skepticism she's faced.

"One of the greatest pleasures in life is to do something that people (say) you can't do," Hansen said. "We know that we can do this. It doesn't matter what anyone else says."

Other concerts on the 2011 docket are new country artist Glen Templeton and his Full Throttle Band, which will play a benefit June 18 for Boys & Girls Club of the Ozarks, 38 Special and The Kentucky Headhunters on July 2, and stand-up comic Larry the Cable Guy on Aug. 20.

Hansen said additional concerts will be announced as they are booked.

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28	29	30	31																	

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Today's Events

Monday, July 29, 2013

No events scheduled for today.

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