Lafayette's Cajundome opens Sunday

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LAFAYETTE - The long-awaited D-day for the $60 million Cajundome is Sunday when the facility's doors open to the public.

The opening celebration will begin a three-week series of concerts, banquets, trade shows and sporting events designed to demonstrate the civic center's capabilities.

The grand opening will begin at 1 p.m. Sunday when the public will be admitted free to dedication ceremonies. Tours of the dome will be available, and local entertainers will be performing throughout the facility. They will include musicians, magicians, clowns, dancers and singers.

The opening ceremonies end at 6 p.m. with a fireworks display outside the dome.

Employees have been working at a frenzied pace for the past month, said Mike Barber, Cajundome director.

"The last three weeks of work are really coming together," Barber said Friday.

Some finishing touches won't be completed in time, but all the work from 35 subcontractors should be finished soon after the opening.

Barber said.

He said the adverse weather of Hurricane Juan had caused concern that some of the exterior work would not be completed on time, but ample sunshine this week has put the outside work back on schedule.

The weather has been so good in fact that the four-lane Cajundome Boulevard, which runs in front of the dome and connects West Congress and Johnston streets, will be open Sunday. The new street is expected to aid in the flow of traffic before and after events at the dome.

Parking is available for $1 and $2, and parking lots will be monitored by security guards.

On Friday, reporters were given a tour of the facility, and samples of the concessions were available. Local fare will include boudin and Cajun sausage, in addition to the traditional hot dogs and popcorn. At some events, beer and wine will be sold, but food service employees have been warned not to serve alcohol to minors or anyone who appears to be intoxicated.

On Monday, the first concert will be held, featuring Kenny Rogers, the Oak Ridge Boys and Sawyer Brown. The concert was sold out a few days after tickets went on sale.

The rock group Foreigner will perform Nov. 15.

The Lafayette Chamber of Commerce will hold its 50th annual anniversary banquet Nov. 20, and it will be the first major event to be catered in the dome. Syndicated columnist Jack Anderson will address the chamber.

An exhibition of skiing products will be held Nov. 21 by Ski and Scuba.

On Nov. 22, the University of Southwestern Louisiana's Ragin' Cajun basketball team will play the University of Georgia, and on the following night the Cajuns take on Jacksonville State. The USL basketball team will no longer have its games in Blackham Coliseum.

On Nov. 24, country music performer Ricky Skaggs will be in concert.

From Nov. 27 until Dec. 1, the Muppets will perform eight shows.