Cajundome still brings in money, director says

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LAFAYETTE — The Cajundome is proving its doubters were wrong, the facility's director said here Monday.

Mike Noah, who started a year ago as director of the dome, told the Acadiana Press Club that the facility is showing that entertainment dollars are still being spent in the area.

"The market is not dead," he said. "It's not stone broke."

The dome's fiscal standing has improved dramatically, he said, as the bookings also have increased.

The city of Lafayette's general fund provides $500,000 a year for the operation of the facility, Noah said, but in turn the dome during the past seven months has generated direct taxes of $36,000, utility revenue of $145,000, and indirect tax benefits.

The dome's good points must be sold in order to attract performers to come to Lafayette, he said, something that wasn't being done before he arrived.

"Nobody's going to walk up to the front door, knock on it and say 'I want to rent this building,'" Noah said.

Last weekend's attendance of 10,200 at the Bon Jovi concert proved that Lafayette will turn out for events, he said. "It's proving a point that there is a market here."

The University of Southwestern Louisiana has become more flexible, rescheduling basketball dates if enough lead time is given, Noah said.

But Noah said it has become obvious to him that a 100,000-square-foot convention center will be needed eventually. The dome is the finest multi-purpose facility, second only to the Meadowlands in New Jersey, he said, but a building specifically for conventions is needed to attract more business.

Noah said he is hoping to get a championship fight scheduled at the dome for junior lightweight boxer Brian Mitchell of Lafayette.

He said he has also made a bid for an NCAA regional basketball playoff.

Even though the dome wants to attract more events, Noah said, certain rock groups which use foul language are not being allowed to perform at the dome, such as extreme heavy metal groups.

A rap group, rumored to resort to bawdy behavior on stage, recently performed at the dome under the agreement that those attending the concert must be 17 or older, he said.

The dome's roof still leaks, he said, but the Cajundome Commission is trying to get the state to come up with a plan for repairing the problem, since the state funded construction of the $63 million facility.