Hall said solution to Cajundome scheduling

By BRUCE SCHULTZ
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LAFAYETTE — An exhibition hall, now in the preliminary stages, should eliminate many of the scheduling problems currently facing the Cajundome, officials say.

"The scheduling conflicts will be reduced, with such events as trade shows and Mardi Gras," said Ray Authement, University of Southwestern Louisiana president. "It will disappear because we'll have room outside the Cajundome."

For example, a conflict arose recently with the Krewe of Triton for Mardi Gras festivities Feb. 19-20, preventing the IceGators hockey team from practicing in the facility.

Greg Davis, Cajundome director, said the exhibition hall would give him more flexibility in scheduling.

"It will be a blessing because you can't imagine what it's like to be in this position," he said. "Everybody's interest is more important than the other guy's, and no matter what I do I'm going to look like the bad guy to someone."

Davis said he's had to turn away major concerts, such as Rod Stewart and Luther Vandross, because other events were already scheduled.

The hockey team's manager, Dave Berryman, told the Cajundome Commission on Thursday that scheduling conflicts could prevent the team from getting the Cajundome for Friday and Saturday night games, that are more likely to result in sellout crowds.

Berryman said he wasn't referring as much to conflicts with USL basketball games as he was the smaller events.

At that meeting, Authement made it clear that USL has already compromised by not holding most of its basketball practices in the Cajundome to provide access for the hockey team.

"Let's understand why this building is here," Authement said at the meeting.

"I'm not going to sacrifice my basketball program."

The state funded most of the $60 million Cajundome, and the university gets to use it for home basketball games, graduations and other events.

Berryman urged the commission to form a committee to work out scheduling problems. Authement ended the discussion on a positive note.

"It's so refreshing to have these problems," he told fellow commissioners.

Funding construction of the exhibition hall isn't a problem, Authement said in an interview.

"It will not cost the state any money," Authement said.

Authement said he is continuing negotiations to build a hotel at the corner of Congress and Cajundome Boulevard. He said more than two franchises are looking at the site for a hotel with 100-150 rooms.

A hotel there would be an asset for the exhibition hall, having a strong drawing power for conventions, he said.

Some conventions, such as the Louisiana Gulf Coast Oil Exposition, held in odd-numbered years, might use the Cajundome and exhibition hall, he said.

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When it is approved, he said, it will clear the way for choosing an architect by May or June and undertaking the bond sale.

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