

YOU'LL NEVER BELIEVE WHAT HAPPENED AT THE COLISEUM

THE COLISEUM STAFF, AFTER EXTENSIVE SEARCH, BELIEVES THAT ELVIS PRESLEY IS NO LONGER IN THE BUILDING. ALTHOUGH ELVIS PLAYED THE COLISEUM TWICE DURING HIS SPECTACULAR CAREER, THE STAFF DEFINITELY BELIEVES "THAT ELVIS HAS LEFT THE BUILDING." THE STAFF, HOWEVER, IS NOT QUITE SO SURE ABOUT JIMMY HOFFA, WHO ALSO MADE AN APPEARANCE AT THE COLISEUM. AFTER DILIGENT SEARCH, THEY BELIEVE THAT MR. HOFFA IS NO LONGER IN THE BUILDING, NOR IN THE FOUNDATION, NOR IN ANY OF THE PILLARS.

THESE ARE JUST TWO OF THE MANY FAMOUS PEOPLE WHO HAVE APPEARED AT THE COLISEUM, ALONG WITH 5 PRESIDENTS, MANY WELL-KNOWN CELEBRITIES AND PERFORMERS, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL, HOCKEY, BASKETBALL AND BASEBALL PLAYERS, AMATEUR AND PROFESSIONAL, ALONG WITH DINOSAURS, ELEPHANTS, LLAMAS, MIDGET RACERS, MONSTER TRUCKS, WRESTLERS, AND ALMOST ALL THE HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE GRADUATIONS IN THE CITY, AND EXHIBITIONS OF EVERY TYPE AND NATURE. THE COLISEUM WILL TURN 60 THIS YEAR, AND IN ITS 60 YEARS, IT HAS BEEN MUCH MORE THAN JUST AN ARENA, IT HAS BEEN THE NEAREST THING WE HAVE TO A "COMMUNITY CENTER."

THE WORD "COLISEUM" COMES, OF COURSE, FROM THE LATIN WORD "COLOSSUS" OR COLOSSAL, AND THE DICTIONARY DEFINITION IS "A LARGE BUILDING DESIGNED TO HOLD MANY SPECTATORS OR ACTIVITIES."

THE FIRST COLISEUM IN ROME WAS ORIGINALLY CALLED THE FLAVIAN AMPHITHEATER AFTER EMPEROR FLAVIUS – BUT IT WAS BUILT NEAR A STATUTE OF NERO WHICH WAS 115 FEET HIGH AND WHICH WAS REFERRED TO AS THE "COLOSSEO;" CITIZENS STARTED CALLING IT "THE AMPHITHEATER BY THE COLOSSEO," AND LATER SHORTENED IT TO "COLOSSEUM" OR COLISEUM.

THE ROMAN COLISEUM WAS BUILT IN 80 AD AND USED FOR OVER 500 YEARS AND, OF COURSE, STILL STANDS AFTER ALMOST 2,000 YEARS.

AFTER ROME, THE TERM "COLISEUM" HAS BEEN USED TO DESCRIBE MANY OTHER STADIUMS OR ARENAS AROUND THE WORLD.

THE LOS ANGELES COLISEUM BUILT IN 1923 AS AN OUTDOOR STADIUM, IS ONE THAT IS WELL KNOWN. IT IS NOW THE HOME OF THE SOUTHERN CAL TROJANS, AND FOR NOTRE DAME GAMES, IT HAS BEEN KNOWN TO HOLD OVER 100,000. IT HAS ALSO HOSTED THE OLYMPICS TWICE – IN 1933, AND AGAIN IN 1984.

A WELL-KNOWN LOCAL "COLISEUM" IS THE ONE AT THE STATE FAIRGROUNDS IN INDIANAPOLIS. THIS WAS BUILT IN 1939, AND CALLED THE STATE FAIR COLISEUM. A PROPANE GAS EXPLOSION IN 1963 CAUSED A REAL TRAGEDY, KILLING 74 PEOPLE, INJURING OVER 400, AND DOING CONSIDERABLE DAMAGE TO THE BUILDING. AFTER IT WAS REBUILT, THE NAME WAS CHANGED IN THE 1980'S TO THE "PEPSI COLISEUM," AND THAT'S WHAT IT'S KNOWN AS TODAY. NOW, IT IS UNDERGOING A COMPLETE REMODELING, WITH THE EXTERIOR WALLS ALL REMAINING, BUT A COMPLETE OVERHAUL INSIDE.

INCIDENTALLY, THIS IS A BUILDING THAT WAS BUILT MANY YEARS BEFORE THE COLISEUM IN FORT WAYNE.

THE IDEA BEHIND BUILDING A COLISEUM IN FORT WAYNE STARTED IN 1944 DURING WORLD WAR II. AT A MEETING OF THE FORT WAYNE JUNIOR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, KNOWN THEN AS THE JAYCEES, IN FEBRUARY, 1944, PAUL GRONAUER, LATER PRESIDENT OF ANTHONY WAYNE BANK, PROPOSED THAT A MAJOR BUILDING BE CONSTRUCTED "WHICH WOULD ACCOMMODATE LARGE GROUPS OF PEOPLE FOR RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES." IT WAS ALSO PROPOSED THAT THIS BUILDING BE DEDICATED AS A MEMORIAL TO THE VETERANS OF ALL WARS. THEY WANTED A BUILDING THAT COULD SERVE THE PUBLIC – RATHER THAN JUST A STATUTE OR MONUMENT TYPE MEMORIAL. THIS WAS AN EXCELLENT DECISION AND SHOWED GREAT PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

RAY PERRY, A FORT WAYNE ATTORNEY, AND INCIDENTALLY ALSO ONE OF THE FOUNDERS OF THE KOMETS – WAS PRESIDENT OF THE JAYCEES AT THE TIME – DID WHAT ORGANIZATIONS GENERALLY DO WITH NEW IDEAS – HE APPOINTED A COMMITTEE. THE JAYCEES COMMITTEE THEN FORMED A GROUP OF PROMINENT CITIZENS, AND THE MATTER WAS PRESENTED TO THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS, WHO PLACED IT ON THE BALLOT IN THE 1946 FALL ELECTION FOR A REFERENDUM. THE JAYCEES PUT ON AN EXTENSIVE CAMPAIGN AND THE REFERENDUM WAS APPROVED WITH 25,000 VOTES FOR AND ONLY 5,000 AGAINST.

THIS WAS ALMOST CONTRARY TO ANOTHER SIGNIFICANT REFERENDUM THAT HAPPENED ABOUT THE SAME TIME, BUT ONE YEAR LATER. RALPH GATES

FROM COLUMBIA CITY, THEN GOVERNOR OF INDIANA, USED HIS WASHINGTON CONTACTS TO GET APPROVAL FOR TWO FREEWAYS TO BE BUILT THROUGH DOWNTOWN FORT WAYNE. THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WOULD SUPPLY THE BASIC AMOUNT OF THE CONSTRUCTION COST AND FORT WAYNE'S PERCENTAGE AMOUNTED TO ONLY 4 MILLION DOLLARS, WHICH COULD BE PAID OFF OVER A 10-YEAR PERIOD. THE EAST-WEST PORTION OF THE FREEWAY WOULD HAVE RUN BETWEEN LINCOLN LIFE AND THE PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD, AND THE NORTH-SOUTH FREEWAY WOULD HAVE PARALLELED HANNA TO THE SOUTH AND CLINTON TO THE NORTH. THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN A LARGE CLOVERLEAF SERVING DOWNTOWN FORT WAYNE NEAR LINCOLN LIFE. THIS WAS ALSO SUBMITTED TO A REFERENDUM IN THE 1947 CITY ELECTION – WHERE IT LOST BY A MARGIN OF 24,000 TO 15,000.

THEREFORE, IN THE SPACE OF A SHORT TIME IN 1946 AND 1947, WE HAD TWO MAJOR EVENTS THAT HAVE SHAPED NOT ONLY DOWNTOWN, BUT A LOT OF FORT WAYNE'S FUTURE FOR OVER 50 YEARS. THE FREEWAYS, OF COURSE, BECAME A NON-EVENT, AND NOT UNTIL THE CONSTRUCTION OF INTERSTATE 69 AND 469 WAS THERE A BYPASS FOR TRUCK TRAFFIC AROUND DOWNTOWN FORT WAYNE, AND UNFORTUNATELY STILL NO EASY ACCESS INTO THE DOWNTOWN AREA FROM ANY DIRECTION.

ONE ALSO HAS TO WONDER THAT HAD THE FREEWAYS BEEN BUILT THROUGH DOWNTOWN FORT WAYNE, WHETHER THERE MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN A GREAT INCENTIVE TO LOCATE THE COLISEUM DOWNTOWN IN SOME PROXIMITY TO THE CLOVERLEAF NEAR LINCOLN LIFE SO THAT EASY ACCESS WOULD HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE. CERTAINLY, THE LAND WOULD HAVE BEEN

MORE EXPENSIVE THAN THE \$1,000 AN ACRE THAT WAS PAID, AND TRAFFIC AND PARKING PROBLEMS MIGHT HAVE EXISTED, BUT ONE WONDERS WHAT THE FUTURE MAY HAVE HELD HAD THE TWO BEEN ON THE SAME BALLOT.

AFTER THE COLISEUM WAS APPROVED IN THE REFERENDUM, A STUDY WAS MADE WHERE TO LOCATE THE COLISEUM, AND A SITE AT THE INTERSECTION OF PARNELL AND CALIFORNIA ROAD WAS SELECTED. THIS WAS ADJACENT TO WHAT WAS THEN CALLED "MUNICIPAL BEACH," THE PUBLIC SWIMMING BEACH ON THE ST. JOSEPH RIVER JUST SOUTH OF COLISEUM BOULEVARD, AND 100 ACRES WERE PURCHASED FOR APPROXIMATELY \$1,000 PER ACRE. THE AREA WAS SELECTED ALSO BECAUSE IT WAS LOCATED ON WHAT WAS THEN DEEMED TO BE A VERY OPEN HIGHWAY – CALLED THE "NORTH BYPASS," OR THE "CIRCUMURBAN." UNFORTUNATELY, WITH DEVELOPMENT, THE CIRCUMURBAN, NOW COLISEUM BOULEVARD, HAS ALSO BECOME KNOWN AS "STOPLIGHT CITY."

A 3 MILLION DOLLAR BOND ISSUE WAS AWARDED AT 1½% INTEREST AND CONSTRUCTION WAS BEGUN IN 1949; THE COLISEUM WAS COMPLETED AND NORMAL BECAUSE OF A STEEL SHORTAGE WITH THE KOREAN WAR THEN IN PROGRESS. AS INDICATED EARLIER, THE COLISEUM WAS DEDICATED AS A MEMORIAL TO VETERANS OF ALL WARS, AND ALTHOUGH MANY PEOPLE HAVE NEVER BEEN THERE, A VETERANS' MEMORIAL HALL IS LOCATED AT THE NORTH END OF THE COLISEUM WITH THE NAMES OF VETERANS WHO LOST THEIR LIVES NOT JUST IN WORLD WAR II, BUT IN ALL THE WARS INCLUDING WORLD WAR I AND KOREA, VIETNAM, IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN. THE COLISEUM THEN IS A WAR MEMORIAL IN MORE THAN NAME ONLY, AND THE VETERANS TAKE A VERY

ACTIVE ROLE IN MATTERS WHICH TAKE PLACE AT THE COLISEUM. YOU MAY RECALL THE MEMORIAL DAY PARADE USUALLY ENDS AT THE COLISEUM WITH A CEREMONY.

ALMOST FROM THE BEGINNING, THE COLISEUM HAS FULFILLED ITS MISSION AS A PLACE TO ACCOMMODATE LARGE GROUPS FOR "RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES." IT IS INTERESTING THAT THREE OF THE EARLY USAGES HAVE CONTINUED EVERY YEAR SINCE. ONE OF THE EARLIEST IS THE DOG SHOW, WHICH HAS BEEN THERE EVERY YEAR SINCE THE COLISEUM OPENED. THE SHRINE CIRCUS HAS BEEN COMING TO THE COLISEUM FOR OVER 50 YEARS, AND MANY MAY REMEMBER THE TIME WHEN THE CIRCUS WAS ALWAYS PRECEDED BY A BIG CIRCUS PARADE FROM DOWNTOWN FORT WAYNE UP SPY RUN TO THE COLISEUM WITH THE ELEPHANTS LEADING THE WAY AND ALL THE CIRCUS ENTOURAGE FOLLOWING. THE KOMETS HAVE BEEN THERE ALMOST AS LONG. THEY STARTED IN 1952, BUT MISSED ONE YEAR WHEN THEY WENT OFF TO BE CALLED THE "CHOPPERS" IN ALBANY, NEW YORK, BEFORE THEY CAME BACK WITH NEW OWNERSHIP UNDER THE FRANKES THE FOLLOWING YEAR.

ALONG WITH DOGS, THE CIRCUS AND HOCKEY, THE DIVERSITY OF EVENTS AND WELL KNOWN PERFORMERS WHICH HAVE APPEARED AT THE COLISEUM IS ALMOST MINDBOGGLING. IN ADDITION TO ELVIS, BOB HOPE ALSO APPEARED TWICE. ONE TIME HE WAS FORGOTTEN BY HIS EXTENSIVE TRAVELING ENTOURAGE AND HAD TO BE DRIVEN BACK TO THE VAN ORMAN HOTEL BY DON MEYERS, THEN THE COLISEUM MANAGER. ONE OF THE ONE-LINERS THAT HOPE TOLD AT THE COLISEUM IN THE 50'S WAS THAT HE WOULD

LIVE A LONG TIME BECAUSE HIS DOCTOR WAS STILL PAYING ON HIS MORTGAGE. SURE ENOUGH, HOPE LIVED TO BE 100!

NAT KING COLE, DOLLY PARTON, JOHNNY CASH, SONNY AND CHER, CHER ALONE, THE JACKSON FIVE, LAWRENCE WELK, JOHN MELLENCAMP, AEROSMITH, KISS, KENNY CHESNEY, ROY ROGERS WAS HERE WITH TRIGGER, LIBERACE WAS HERE WITH HIS FAMOUS CANDELABRA ON THE PIANO, AND I COULD GO ON AND ON. DURING THE 50'S AND 60'S, WRESTLING WAS A BIG DRAW AND STILL COMES EACH YEAR. THE HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS HAVE BEEN HERE ALMOST EVERY YEAR, AS HAS THE ICE SHOW, PUT ON EITHER BY DISNEY OR ANOTHER GROUP. ELTON JOHN WILL BE HERE ON APRIL 21ST – THIS IS HIS SECOND APPEARANCE AT THE COLISEUM.

AS I SAID INDICATED EARLIER, FIVE PRESIDENTS HAVE APPEARED; SOME HAD FUNDRAISERS AND SOME JUST MADE SPEECHES. NIXON AND FORD VISITED WHILE THEY WERE SITTING PRESIDENTS, AND REAGAN, TRUMAN AND BUSH I, EITHER BEFORE OR AFTER THEY SERVED.

A NUMBER OF VICE PRESIDENTS AND VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES HAVE ALSO APPEARED AT THE COLISEUM. THE MOST RECENT WAS SARAH PALIN, WHO APPEARED IN THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN. FOR HER APPEARANCE, THE SECRET SERVICE WENT TO GREAT LENGTHS FOR SECURITY, CHECKING OR PATTING DOWN EVERY PERSON PERMITTED TO ENTER. THIS CAUSED A MASSIVE PROBLEM WITH PEOPLE STANDING IN LONG LINES OUTSIDE TO GET INTO THE ARENA. THE COLISEUM LEARNED THAT IN ANY OTHER SITUATION LIKE THIS, THEY SHOULD HAVE PORT-A-POTTIES AT THE READY FOR THE PEOPLE STANDING IN LINE.

IN SPORTS, WHO COULD EVER FORGET HILLIARD GATES BROADCASTING NOT ONLY PISTONS GAMES BUT ALL TYPES OF HIGH SCHOOL AND OTHER SPORTING EVENTS FROM THE COLISEUM AND ALWAYS LED OFF BY SAYING, "THIS IS HILLIARD GATES BROADCASTING FROM THE BEAUTIFUL ALLEN COUNTY WAR MEMORIAL COLISEUM IN FORT WAYNE, INDIANA." HE BEGAN EVERY BROADCAST LIKE THIS FOR OVER 40 YEARS.

OF COURSE, ONE OF THE EARLY TENANTS WAS THE ZOLLNER PISTONS, WHO PREVIOUSLY PLAYED AT NORTH SIDE HIGH SCHOOL. THEY MOVED TO THE COLISEUM JUST AFTER IT OPENED AND PLAYED THERE FOR 5 SEASONS. IN 1953, THE NBA ALL STAR GAME WAS HELD AT THE "BEAUTIFUL" WAR MEMORIAL COLISEUM WHICH HAD ONLY OPENED THE YEAR BEFORE.

HOWEVER, IN 1955, A REAL CRISIS TOOK PLACE. BOWLING WAS A BIG SPORT IN THE 50'S. THE COLISEUM LANDED THE AMERICAN BOWLING CONGRESS, A BIG NATIONAL TOURNAMENT, AND 38 LANES WERE SET UP IN THE COLISEUM TO ACCOMMODATE THIS EVENT THAT WENT FROM MARCH THROUGH JUNE. THE TOURNAMENT WAS SCHEDULED AFTER THE REGULAR NBA SEASON, BUT AS GOOD LUCK WOULD HAVE IT THE PISTONS NOT ONLY MADE THE PLAYOFFS, BUT WENT ALL THE WAY TO THE FINALS. UNFORTUNATELY, THE FINAL SERIES AGAINST SYRACUSE CONFLICTED WITH THE BOWLING CONGRESS TOURNAMENT AND THE PISTONS WERE HOMELESS FOR THE FINAL GAMES. THE PISTONS HAD TO PLAY THE LAST TWO GAMES IN INDIANAPOLIS, AND ENDED UP LOSING THE CHAMPIONSHIP.

AS PHIL OLOFSON, WHO WAS A LOCAL PROMOTER AT THE TIME SAID, "FROM THE DATE THAT THE PISTONS LOST THE CHAMPIONSHIP, THEY WERE

HEADED OUT OF TOWN," AND SURE ENOUGH, TWO YEARS LATER, FRED ZOLLNER TOOK THE PISTONS TO DETROIT. I HAVE SAID A NUMBER OF TIMES IN A PRESENTATION THAT I MAKE TO LEADERSHIP FORT WAYNE EACH YEAR, THAT THE WORST THING THAT EVER HAPPENED TO THE FORT WAYNE ECONOMY WAS NOT HARVESTER LEAVING, OR NOT EVEN LINCOLN LIFE MOVING THEIR CORPORATE OFFICES, AS BAD AS THOSE EVENTS WERE, BUT WHEN FRED ZOLLNER TOOK THE PISTONS TO DETROIT. IF WE COULD HAVE RETAINED THE PISTONS, WE MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE GREEN BAY OF THE NBA.

IN ADDITION TO THE PISTONS, PRO BASKETBALL HAS HAD THREE OTHER TEAMS PLAY AT THE COLISEUM. THE FORT WAYNE HOOSIERS PLAYED ONE YEAR IN THE MID-70'S. THE FORT WAYNE FURY PLAYED FOR 10 YEARS FROM 1991 TO 2001, AND CURRENTLY THE NBA DEVELOPMENTAL LEAGUE MAD ANTS CALL THE COLISEUM HOME.

HAVING SOME PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT WITH THE FURY, THE COMMUNITY SUPPORT WAS GREAT WHEN THE FURY OPENED PLAY IN 1991. AT THE SELLOUT ON OPENING NIGHT AGAINST THE COLUMBUS, OHIO TEAM, IT WAS DECIDED TO HAVE THE FANS STAND UNTIL THE FURY SCORED – TO BUILD FAN SUPPORT BEHIND THE TEAM. ALL THE FURY FANS STOOD AFTER THE OPENING TIP OFF – AND STOOD – AND STOOD – AND STOOD. IT WAS ALMOST THE SECOND QUARTER BEFORE THE FURY FINALLY SCORED AND THE FANS SAT DOWN. THAT WAS THE END OF STANDING! THE FURY HAD A GREAT RUN FOR 10 YEARS, WITH SUCH PLAYERS AS JAY EDWARDS AND LYNDON JONES FROM MARION AND IU, AND ALSO DAMON BAILEY AND MOOCHIE NORRIS LATER. THE FURY FINALLY

FOLDED AFTER ISIAH THOMAS BOUGHT THE ENTIRE CBA LEAGUE, THEN RAN IT INTO BANKRUPTCY.

HOCKEY, OF COURSE, HAS HAD A TREMENDOUS RUN AT THE COLISEUM. NEXT TO HERSEY, PENNSYLVANIA, THE KOMETS HAVE ONE OF THE BEST DRAWING TEAMS IN MINOR LEAGUE HOCKEY AND HAVE WON THE CHAMPIONSHIP NUMEROUS TIMES IN THEIR LEAGUE. THE KOMETS FAN BASE IN FORT WAYNE, AND HOCKEY'S POPULARITY NEVER CEASES TO AMAZE OTHER TEAMS IN OTHER CITIES – ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING INDIANA IS THE HOME OF HOOSIER BASKETBALL. THE YEAR AFTER YEAR DRAW OF THE KOMETS (AND ALSO NOW THE TIN CAPS) IS ONE OF THE REASONS FORT WAYNE HAS BEEN RANKED AS THE NO. 1 CITY FOR MINOR LEAGUE SPORTS AT VARIOUS TIMES.

THE REAL SELLOUT CROWD FOR YEARS, OF COURSE, WAS WHEN HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL PLAYED AT THE COLISEUM. IN ADDITIONAL TO SECTIONALS AND REGIONALS, ALMOST EVERY YEAR FROM 1953 ON, THE SEMI-STATE WAS HELD AT THE COLISEUM BEFORE RABID AND SELLOUT CROWDS. GREAT PLAYERS LIKE JIMMY RAYL AND RICK MOUNT LIT UP THE PLACE WITH THEIR SHOOTING ABILITY. A NUMBER OF TEAMS FROM THE FORT WAYNE SEMI-FINALS WENT ON TO WIN THE STATE. WHEN CLASS BASKETBALL CAME IN, THE NEED FOR SUCH A LARGE VENUE HAS NOT NORMALLY BEEN REQUIRED.

HOWEVER, IN RECENT YEARS, THE COLISEUM HAS BEEN THE SITE OF THE GIRLS' INDIANA IHSAA STATE FINALS. CONFLICTS AT CONSECO, NOW BANKER'S LIFE ARENA, HAVE CAUSED THE IHSAA TO LOOK FOR A VENUE OUTSIDE OF INDIANAPOLIS, AND FORT WAYNE WAS SUCCESSFUL IN BIDDING AGAINST ARENAS TO HOST THE 2010 AND 2011 CHAMPIONSHIP.

MAJOR DINNER EVENTS WERE ALSO HELD AT THE COLISEUM EACH YEAR IN THE MAIN ARENA. ONES I PARTICULARLY REMEMBER ARE THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE DINNERS WHICH INVARIABLY DREW OVER 1,000 PEOPLE. THE SPEAKERS WERE WELL KNOWN SPORTS, ENTERTAINERS OR RELIGIOUS FIGURES. ROBERT SCHULLER FROM THE CRYSTAL CATHEDRAL IN CALIFORNIA SPOKE ONE YEAR, THANKS TO RICHARD FREELAND. ALSO, HARRY REASONER AND JIM MCKAY, COMMENTATORS FROM THE SPORTS WORLD, ARE OTHERS I REMEMBER.

AT ALL THESE EVENTS, FIBERGLASS BOARDING WAS LAID ON TOP OF THE ICE FLOOR. THE ONLY PROBLEM WAS THAT AFTER PEOPLE SAT DOWN FOR DINNER THE COLD FROM THE ICE BELOW WOULD SEEP THROUGH THE FIBERGLASS AND PEOPLE, PARTICULARLY WOMEN WITH VERY THIN STOCKINGS AND HIGH HEELS WOULD END UP WITH VERY COLD FEET BEFORE THE DINNER WAS OVER.

IN ADDITION, A GREAT NUMBER OF SHOWS ARE AT THE COLISEUM EACH YEAR – THE LARGEST IN RECENT YEARS IS THE VERA BRADLEY SALE, WHICH LASTS ALMOST A WEEK AND DRAWS OVER 60,000 PEOPLE; IN ADDITION, THERE IS THE HOME AND GARDEN SHOW, THE BOAT SHOW, THE RV SHOW, THE GOLF SHOW, AND THE FARM SHOW, WHICH INCIDENTALLY IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST FARM SHOWS IN THE COUNTRY.

MANY OUTDOOR EVENTS ALSO TAKE PLACE IN THE COLISEUM PARKING LOT. THE MIDWAY FOR THE THREE RIVERS FESTIVAL IS IN THE PARKING LOT EACH YEAR, AS DO MANY "AUTO TENT SALES" DURING THE YEAR. THE GOLD WING ANNUAL CONVENTION WAS HELD IN 2002 AND 2005, AND WILL BE BACK

AGAIN THIS YEAR – BRINGING 10,000 MOTORCYCLES IN FOR A WEEK. IF YOU ARE IN THE VICINITY, EARPLUGS WILL BE HELPFUL!

THE GRADUATION CEREMONIES FOR ALMOST EVERY HIGH SCHOOL IN ALLEN COUNTY, AND GRADUATIONS FOR IPFW, ST. FRANCIS AND INDIANA TECH ALL TAKE PLACE AT THE COLISEUM. WEDDING RECEPTIONS, COMPANY EVENTS, AND MANY MEETINGS ALSO ARE ON THE SCHEDULE.

WITH THE MEMORABLE HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT GAMES, BUT ALSO WITH THE GRADUATIONS, WEDDINGS AND OTHER EVENTS, MANY PEOPLE, INCLUDING I'M SURE SOME OF YOU, COULD SAY WITH SOME JUSTIFICATION – THAT SOME OF THEIR REALLY MEMORABLE EVENTS ACTUALLY TOOK PLACE AT THE COLISEUM.

OVERALL, THE COLISEUM DRAWS OVER ONE MILLION VISITORS A YEAR AND HAS NOW FOR OVER 20 YEARS. FOR TOTAL DRAW, IT RANKS WITH SOME OF THE MAJOR ARENAS IN THE COUNTRY, AND VERY FEW OF THESE CAN TOP THE ABSOLUTE DIVERSITY OF EVENTS THAT TAKE PLACE EACH YEAR. THE TOTAL NUMBER OF EVENTS EACH YEAR IS BETWEEN 1,300 AND 1,500 OR ON AVERAGE 3 TO 4 DIFFERENT EVENTS EVERY DAY; THE ECONOMIC IMPACT ON THE RESTAURANTS, HOTELS, AND STORES ON THE NORTH SIDE EXCEEDS 100 MILLION DOLLARS EACH YEAR. THE COLISEUM IS CONSISTENTLY RANKED AS ONE OF THE TOP 100 ARENAS IN THE COUNTRY BY THE VARIOUS TRADE JOURNALS THAT COVER MAJOR VENUES.

A LITTLE KNOWN ASPECT OF THE COLISEUM IS PROVIDING SERVICE IN TIMES OF DISASTER. THE COLISEUM WAS THE STAGING AREA AND COMMAND

POST FOR FILLING SANDBAGS IN THE FLOODS OF 1982 AND 1984. THE 30- AND 40-TON SAND TRUCKS ACTUALLY DID OVER \$400,000 DAMAGE TO THE PARKING LOT ASPHALT, BUT IT WAS HANDLED IN THE COLISEUM BUDGET IN FOLLOWING YEARS. THE COLISEUM TOOK IN PEOPLE FROM EDEN GREEN AND CHAPEL OAKS APARTMENT COMPLEXES IN FROM WHAT MANY WILL RECALL WAS THE "TIRE FIRE" OFF CREIGHTON AVENUE IN 1997, WHICH MADE A NUMBER OF PEOPLE HOMELESS. WHEN THE TORNADOS HIT THE NORTH PART OF FORT WAYNE IN 2005, COTS WERE SET UP AGAIN FOR PEOPLE IN THE COLISEUM FOR A NUMBER OF DAYS. RANDY BROWN INDICATES THEY HAVE A PROCEDURE WHEN THE COLISEUM IS USED TO HOUSE PEOPLE FROM A DISASTER. NUMBER ONE IS TO START BAKING COOKIES; FEED PEOPLE COOKIES AS SOON AS THEY ARRIVE TO GET THEIR BLOOD SUGAR BACK UP; SECONDLY, SET UP PHONES SO PEOPLE CAN CALL THEIR FAMILIES.

IN ITS 60 YEARS, THE COLISEUM HAS ALSO BEEN THE SUBJECT OF CONTROVERSY NUMEROUS TIMES. DURING THE 70'S, PEOPLE ATTENDING CONCERTS BECOME SO UNRULY – THEY WOULD THROW ROLLS OF TOILET PAPER IN THE TRASH BARRELS AND SET THEM ON FIRE. WOODEN CHAIRS WOULD BE BROKEN UP AND SET ON FIRE. DESPITE ALL ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL THE CROWD, THE COLISEUM BOARD FINALLY TOOK ACTION AND BANNED ROCK CONCERTS IN 1973. PHIL OLOFSON, THEN A LOCAL PROMOTER – BUT LATER COLISEUM MANAGER – SUED THE COLISEUM AND WON, AND THE ROCK BANDS CAME BACK TO THE COLISEUM, BUT UNDER MUCH MORE STRINGENT REGULATIONS.

THE BUILDING OF THE EXPO CENTER IN 1987 WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE REVENUE FROM THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE TAX TO FINANCE THE ISSUANCE OF BONDS. LITIGATION WITH THE HALLS RESTAURANT CHAIN OVER THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE TAX WENT ON FOR MANY YEARS BEFORE IT WAS FINALLY RESOLVED, AND THE EXPO CENTER COULD BE BUILT. THE BUILDING OF MEMORIAL BASEBALL STADIUM CAUSED ANOTHER ROUND OF LITIGATION WITH THE HALLS OVER THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE TAX.

AND, OF COURSE, IN 2001-2002 BEFORE THE EXPANSION OF THE ARENA AND THE RAISING OF THE ROOF, A LONG PUBLIC DEBATE TOOK PLACE ABOUT WHETHER TO ABANDON THE COLISEUM AND BUILD A NEW ARENA DOWNTOWN. IT WAS ESTIMATED THAT A NEW BUILDING DOWNTOWN WOULD COST IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF 70 TO 80 MILLION; HOWEVER, THE FORD CENTER JUST FINISHED IN EVANSVILLE COST \$135 MILLION. THE EXPANSION OF THE ARENA AND THE RAISING OF THE ROOF AT THE COLISEUM COST \$34.5 MILLION, OR ABOUT A 100 MILLION LESS.

THE RAISING OF THE ROOF ALSO WAS A MUCH DISCUSSED PROJECT. TO HAVE TORN OFF THE OLD ROOF, AND BUILT A COMPLETELY NEW ONE WOULD HAVE COST CONSIDERABLY MORE. MORE IMPORTANTLY, IT WOULD HAVE FORCED THE KOMETS AND OTHER TENANTS TO SEEK AN ALTERNATE PLACE TO PLAY FOR A WHOLE SEASON.

THE DECISION TO TEAR DOWN MEMORIAL STADIUM AFTER PARKVIEW FIELD WAS BUILT DOWNTOWN ALSO GENERATED CONTROVERSY. AFTER HIRING OUTSIDE CONSULTANTS, WHO STUDIED MANY OTHER POSSIBLE USES AND ANALYZED THE COST OF MAINTAINING THE STADIUM, TRANSFERRING IT

TO IPFW, OR TRANSFERRING IT TO A SCHOOL DISTRICT, IT WAS DECIDED THE BEST COURSE OF ACTION WAS TO DEMOLISH THE STADIUM AND CREATE ADDITIONAL PARKING.

AFTER THE BUILDING OF THE EXPO CENTER IN 1989 AND RAISING THE ARENA ROOF IN 2001, THE COLISEUM NOW CONSISTS OF 850,000 SQUARE FEET OF SPACE WITH 5,300 PARKING SPACES. THE SEATING FOR BASKETBALL IS APPROXIMATELY 11,000, FOR HOCKEY, 10,500, AND FOR CONCERTS OVER 13,000.

THE COLISEUM'S ANNUAL BUDGET IS 5 MILLION DOLLARS, WHICH IS APPROVED EACH YEAR BY THE COUNTY COUNCIL. THE COLISEUM HAS USED THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE TAX FOR CAPITAL PROJECTS, BUT IS OTHERWISE NOT ON THE TAX ROLLS AND HAS NOT BEEN FOR OVER 25 YEARS. MANY, IF NOT MOST OTHER ARENAS IN THE COUNTRY RELY ALMOST WHOLLY ON TAX FUNDS FOR A MAJOR PART OF THEIR OPERATING EXPENSES.

THE ALLEN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ARE CHARGED WITH OVERALL MANAGEMENT OF THE COLISEUM, WHICH THEY HAVE DELEGATED TO THE COLISEUM BOARD OF TRUSTEES. THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES IS COMPRISED OF FIVE PEOPLE, THREE OF WHICH ARE FROM THE POLITICAL PARTY WHICH CONSTITUTES THE MAJORITY OF THE COMMISSIONERS, AND THE REMAINING TWO ARE FROM THE MINORITY PARTY. ALTHOUGH THE STAFF AND THE BOARD MANAGE THE COLISEUM ON A DAY-TO-DAY BASIS, MAJOR DECISIONS ABOUT IMPROVEMENTS AND CONSTRUCTION ALMOST ALWAYS INVOLVE THE COMMISSIONERS AND THE COUNTY COUNCIL, AS WELL.

IN 2010, THE LEGISLATURE PROVIDED FOR SETTING UP THE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT BOARD, OR CIB AND TRANSFERRED THE REVENUES FROM THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE TAX TO THAT BOARD, SUBJECT TO RETAINING ENOUGH EACH YEAR TO PAY OFF THE COLISEUM BONDS. THE CIB WILL CURRENTLY RECEIVE 2-3 MILLION DOLLARS EACH YEAR, AND AFTER 2025 WHEN THE BONDS ARE PAID OFF, THEY WILL RECEIVE IN EXCESS OF 5 MILLION PER YEAR. THE AMOUNT CURRENTLY OUTSTANDING ON THE COLISEUM BONDS IS 28 MILLION.

THE COLISEUM HAS ONLY HAD FOUR MANAGERS IN ITS 60 YEARS. DON MEYERS, THE FIRST MANAGER, SERVED FOR 26 YEARS; BOB TENBARGE WAS THERE FOR 8 YEARS; PHIL OLOFSON FOR 3 YEARS; AND RANDY BROWN HAS NOW BEEN THERE FOR 21 YEARS.

IT IS WITH GREAT PRIDE THAT I NOTE THAT RANDY BROWN IS NOW CURRENTLY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF VENUE MANAGERS, WHICH INCLUDES ALMOST ALL LARGE VENUES ACROSS THE COUNTRY, LIKE MCCORMICK PLACE IN CHICAGO, MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, AND ALSO ARENAS IN LONDON, CHINA, AND ACROSS THE WORLD. THAT RANDY HAS BEEN ABLE TO ACHIEVE THIS POSITION OF PROMINENCE IS NOT ONLY A TRIBUTE TO HIS MANAGEMENT SKILLS BUT ALSO THE DISTINCTION THAT IT HAS BROUGHT TO THE COLISEUM. THE COLISEUM IS ABLE TO GET SOME VERY HARD TO BOOK EVENTS, PARTICULARLY CONCERTS, WHICH ONLY PLAY IN MAJOR CITIES, BECAUSE OF THE CONTACTS AND RELATIONSHIPS HE HAS MADE AS A MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION. SOME CONCERTS ARE SELLOUTS AND ARE A VERY GOOD SOURCE OF REVENUE FOR THE COLISEUM. YOU MIGHT NOTE THAT ELTON JOHN

IS ON A SATURDAY NIGHT – ALMOST UNHEARD OF EXCEPT IN THE VERY LARGEST VENUES IN CHICAGO, NEW YORK OR L.A.

THE COLISEUM EMPLOYS OVER 500 PEOPLE. BUT, OF THIS NUMBER, ONLY ABOUT 40 ARE FULL TIME AND THE REMAINDER ARE PART TIME. WHILE EXPERIENCE IN ANY JOB IS DESIRABLE, IN ANYTHING AS COMPLEX AS COLISEUM OPERATIONS, IT IS A REAL PLUS. THE COLISEUM HAS BEEN VERY FORTUNATE THAT IN ADDITION TO HAVING BROWN FOR 21 YEARS, BRYAN CHRISTIE, THE OPERATIONS MANAGER, HAS BEEN THERE FOR OVER 30 YEARS, AND MANY OTHERS HAVE BEEN THERE FOR OVER 10 YEARS. MANY OF THE 400 PLUS PART TIME USHERS AND OTHER PEOPLE HAVE BEEN THERE OVER 30 YEARS.

THIS LONG TIME EXPERIENCE IS PARTICULARLY VITAL WHEN IT COMES TO THE DAILY CHANGEOVER AND THE PREPARATION TIME IT TAKES FOR EVENTS. THE TIME TO ASSEMBLE THE BASKETBALL COURT ON TOP OF THE PADDING THAT IS PLACED OVER THE ICE FOR KOMETS GAMES NORMALLY TAKES 7 OR 8 PEOPLE APPROXIMATELY 8 HOURS TO MAKE THE CHANGEOVER. SETTING UP FOR MAJOR CONCERTS WITH ALL THE SOUND EQUIPMENT IS A REAL ENGINEERING EXERCISE. WHILE THE GREATER PART OF THIS IS DONE BY THE ENGINEERING STAFF OF THE CONCERT, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE COLISEUM STAFF, WHO IS FAMILIAR WITH THE BUILDING, WORK WITH THEM. SOME OF THE CONCERTS COME WITH MANY TRUCKS WHICH BRING IN THE EQUIPMENT. KENNY CHESNEY, FOR EXAMPLE, CAME WITH 17 TRUCKLOADS OF EQUIPMENT, AND ACCOMPANIED BY 18 BUSES.

BIG TRACTOR SHOWS, MONSTER TRUCK EVENTS, MIDGET RACERS AND OTHER EVENTS SOMETIME REQUIRE CARTING IN 80 TRUCKLOADS OF DIRT TO SPREAD ON THE FLOOR ONLY TO BE REMOVED AGAIN AFTER THE EVENT IS OVER. OTHER EVENTS, LIKE THE LLAMAS AND ALPACAS, REQUIRE SOME REMOVALS ALSO.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE RECENT IMPROVEMENTS TO THE COLISEUM – AND WHAT IS PLANNED IN THE NEXT 5 YEARS? EACH YEAR, OF COURSE, THERE IS A REGULAR MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE; IN ADDITION, IN SOME YEARS UPGRADES AND IMPROVEMENTS ARE PLANNED, AND THESE ARE USUALLY DONE OVER THE SUMMER WHEN THE USAGE IS LESS. IN THE PAST THREE YEARS, A NEW SCOREBOARD WAS INSTALLED IN THE ARENA. THE OLD ONE HAD BEEN THERE FOR 15 YEARS, AND THE NEW ONE HAS A NUMBER OF NEW FEATURES, AND WILL GIVE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SELLING ADDITIONAL ADVERTISING. ALSO, RIBBON BOARDS OR NEON LIGHTS THAT PLAY AROUND THE ENTIRE INSIDE OF THE ARENA WERE RECENTLY ADDED. THESE NOT ONLY REPLICATE WHAT YOU CAN SEE AT BANKER'S LIFE, FORMERLY CONSECO, AND LUCAS OIL STADIUM, BUT ALSO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL ADVERTISING OPPORTUNITIES. OVER A THREE YEAR PERIOD, A WHOLE NEW STANDING SEAM METAL ROOF HAS BEEN PUT ON THE COLISEUM AND SHOULD BE GOOD FOR MANY YEARS. NEW DRAPERIES WERE ADDED TO THE NORTH END AND TO THE UPPER LEVELS TO CUT DOWN THE SIZE OF THE ARENA FOR SMALLER EVENTS.

ALSO, IN THE LAST THREE YEARS, A NEW HOLIDAY INN HAS BEEN BUILT ACROSS THE STREET AND EXTENSIVE WORK WAS DONE TO BOTH COLISEUM BOULEVARD AND PARNELL AVENUE.

IN 2012 AND 2013, WE WILL SEE THE ADDITION OF FOOD COURTS TO THE MAIN CORRIDORS, AND A REMODELING OF THE RESTROOMS ON THE MAIN LEVEL. THE ONLY MAJOR IMPROVEMENT BEING DISCUSSED IN THE NEXT 5 YEARS IS A 22,000 SQUARE FOOT ADDITION TO THE EXPO CENTER PLANNED FOR 2014. THIS WOULD BRING THE EXPOSITION SPACE OF THE EXPO CENTER UP TO 132,000 SQUARE FEET, AND IT WOULD ENABLE THE EXPO CENTER TO PROVIDE SPACE FOR CERTAIN SHOWS THAT ARE NOW MAXED OUT, INCLUDING THE VERA BRADLEY SHOW, WHICH BRINGS IN OVER 60,000 VISITORS. ONE MAY RECALL THAT THE HARDWARE WHOLESALERS, NOW DO-IT-BEST, ANNUAL SHOW USED TO BE AT THE COLISEUM, BUT ULTIMATELY LEFT FOR LARGER QUARTERS IN INDIANAPOLIS.

GOING FROM FIVE YEARS TO FURTHER OUT, WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD IN STORE FOR THE COLISEUM? LARRY LEE, A LOCAL BUSINESSMAN, RECENTLY WROTE AN OP-ED ARTICLE INDICATING THAT WE SHOULD BEGIN NOW TO PLAN FOR A NEW COLISEUM TO BE BUILT DOWNTOWN AND AVAILABLE IN EIGHT MORE YEARS, OR 2020. LARRY'S ARTICLE HAD A LOT OF VERY INTERESTING THOUGHTS, AND DOES RAISE THE QUESTION OF EXACTLY WHAT WILL BE THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY IN THE FUTURE FOR A BUILDING AS THE ORIGINAL MISSION INDICATED "TO ACCOMMODATE LARGE GROUPS OF PEOPLE FOR RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES."

WHAT WE HAVE NOW AT THE COLISEUM IS A BUILDING SITUATED ON 100 ACRES, WITH 5,300 PARKING SPACES, AN EXPO CENTER THAT IS ABOUT 20 YEARS OLD, AND AN ARENA THAT IS 60 YEARS OLD BUT HAS BEEN CONSTANTLY

UPDATED. ACCORDING TO THE COLISEUM'S ARCHITECTS, THE ARENA HAS "GOOD BONES AND A GOOD FOUNDATION".

BUT, WHAT WILL BE THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY IN THE FUTURE FOR A MAJOR ARENA AND EXPOSITION BUILDING? IT MAY BE THAT WE WOULD NOT NEED A BUILDING THAT WOULD REQUIRE ADDITIONAL SEATING CAPACITY – OVER AND ABOVE THE 13,000 NOW AVAILABLE. FORD CENTER, JUST COMPLETED IN EVANSVILLE, HAS ABOUT THE SAME SEATING CAPACITY WE NOW HAVE. OF THE EVENTS EACH YEAR AT THE COLISEUM, A SELLOUT OR CAPACITY CROWD IS ONLY REACHED A FEW TIMES EACH YEAR – AND THIS IS USUALLY FOR ONE OF THE MAJOR CONCERTS.

OF COURSE, MUCH DEPENDS UPON THE TYPES OF SHOWS AND EVENTS WHICH WILL BE ATTRACTING PEOPLE A NUMBER OF YEARS FROM NOW. WILL THE YOUNGER OR "WIRED GENERATION" STILL PLAN TO ATTEND MAJOR EVENTS IN PERSON? WILL THERE BE A NEED FOR STATE OF THE ART ELECTRONICS AT EACH SEAT? WE CAN ONLY SPECULATE AND LOOK AT WHAT ARENAS JUST FINISHED OR NOW BEING CONSTRUCTED OR REMODELED ARE DOING.

IT WOULD APPEAR THAT NEW ARENAS LIKE LUCAS OIL OR FORD CENTER AND VARIOUS UPGRADES NOW TAKING PLACE TO NFL STADIUMS ARE MORE ABOUT AMENITIES FOR THE PUBLIC RATHER THAN MORE SEATS OR LARGER BRICK AND MORTAR STRUCTURES. BY MORE AMENITIES, WE ARE TALKING ABOUT UPGRADED RESTAURANTS AND FOOD COURTS, CLUB SEATS AND SKYBOXES, FANCIER SCOREBOARDS AND JUMBOTRONS, AND LOTS OF ELECTRONICS. OF COURSE, MANY OF THESE UPGRADES ARE BEING MADE TO

EXISTING BUILDINGS, AS OPPOSED TO A COMPLETELY NEW BUILDING. IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE WHAT TAKES PLACE WITH THE PEPSI COLISEUM ON THE INDIANA FAIRGROUNDS, WHICH IS LEAVING THE EXTERIOR AS IS, BUT UNDERGOING A COMPLETE REMODELING ON THE INSIDE.

OBVIOUSLY, A KEY BOTTOM-LINE QUESTION ABOUT A COMPLETELY NEW ARENA IS HOW WILL IT BE PAID FOR ONCE BUILT? LUCAS OIL AT OVER 600 MILLION IS IN A TOTALLY DIFFERENT LEAGUE THAN ANYTHING WE WOULD TALK ABOUT, BUT FORD CENTER AT 135 MILLION WOULD BE MORE OF AN EXAMPLE. IF WE TOOK THEIR COST AS A BASE, AND ADDED INFLATION, IF WE ARE LOOKING 15-20 YEARS DOWNSTREAM, YOU COULD EASILY BE TALKING 200 MILLION PLUS. WILL THE BONDS TO BUILD A NEW BUILDING BE SERVICED BY TAX DOLLARS, OR BY INCREASING TICKET PRICES OR RENTAL CHARGES? CURRENTLY, CHARGES AT THE COLISEUM ARE INTENTIONALLY KEPT LOW, PARTICULARLY FOR NOT-FOR-PROFITS, LIKE SCHOOLS FOR GRADUATIONS, AND EVEN FOR OUR SPORTS TEAMS. FOR EXAMPLE, OUR SPORTS TEAMS ARE NOW CHARGED A MAXIMUM OF \$2,500 FOR A NIGHT'S RENTAL – PHASED DOWN CONSIDERABLY IF THEIR ATTENDANCE EXCEEDS CERTAIN FIGURES. IN EVANSVILLE, THE SAME NIGHT'S RENTAL TO THEIR HOCKEY TEAM IS \$11,500.

MOST DISCUSSIONS THAT HAVE TO DO WITH A NEW ARENA ARE NOT ABOUT A CHANGE OF USAGE OR A LARGER ARENA – BUT ABOUT A CHANGE IN LOCATION.

ONE POSSIBILITY THAT HAS BEEN DISCUSSED IS A LOCATION ON I-69 WHICH WOULD MAKE IT MUCH EASIER FOR PEOPLE COMING IN FROM SURROUNDING AREAS. THE OTHER DISCUSSION ABOUT LOCATION, OF COURSE,

IS DOWNTOWN, AND TO BRING THE COLISEUM TRAFFIC TO THE DOWNTOWN AREA. THE OPTIMUM LOCATION DOWNTOWN WOULD, OF COURSE, BE IN PROXIMITY TO PARKVIEW FIELD. THE OTHER POSSIBILITY, OF COURSE, WOULD BE THE OMNI SOURCE LAND NORTH OF THE RIVER. WHILE OMNI SOURCE WOULD NOT PROVIDE THE 100 ACRES WHICH THE COLISEUM NOW HAS – IT WOULD PROVIDE MORE READILY AVAILABLE LAND THAN OTHER SITES; BUT THIS LOCATION IS REALLY NOT A DOWNTOWN LOCATION, BUT ONLY SOMEWHAT CLOSER TO DOWNTOWN THAN THE COLISEUM IS CURRENTLY. ASSEMBLING THE AMOUNT OF LAND REQUIRED FOR A MAJOR BUILDING IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA COULD TAKE A CONSIDERABLE PERIOD OF TIME. RECENT STATUTES, AFTER A SUPREME COURT DECISION IN 2005, HAVE MADE IT MUCH MORE DIFFICULT TO DO THIS USING CONDEMNATION TO ACQUIRE THE LAND.

WHEN RELOCATION OF THE COLISEUM IS DISCUSSED, CONSIDERATION ALSO HAS TO BE GIVEN TO THE FACT THAT THE COLISEUM IS NOW ONLY ONE PART OF AN ENTIRE COMPLEX THAT HAS GROWN UP OVER THE LAST 60 YEARS ALONG AND ADJACENT TO WHAT WAS THEN CALLED THE CIRCUMURBAN – NOW COLISEUM BOULEVARD. THIS COMPLEX INCLUDES, OF COURSE, IPFW AND IVY TECH, NOW MAJOR EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES, WITH THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS EACH DAY. THE BUSINESSES ALONG COLISEUM BOULEVARD AND COLDWATER ROAD, INCLUDING GLENBROOK, AS WELL AS OTHER SMALLER STRIP CENTERS, NOW INVOLVE A VERY SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF THE RETAIL, RESTAURANTS, AUTO DEALERSHIPS, AND OTHER BUSINESSES IN THE WHOLE FORT WAYNE METRO AREA.

AN ARGUMENT COULD BE MADE THAT THE COLISEUM, WHICH AS INDICATED EARLIER, CREATES OVER 100 MILLION IN ECONOMIC IMPACT EACH YEAR, COULD NOT DO THIS UNLESS IT WERE LOCATED IN PROXIMITY TO THIS EDUCATION, RETAIL, AND RESTAURANT COMPLEX ON THE NORTH SIDE. AFTER THE DEVELOPMENT OF IPFW AND IVY TECH TO THE EAST, AND GLENBROOK AND ALL OF THE RETAIL TO THE WEST, PERHAPS FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE WHOLE METRO AREA, AN ARGUMENT COULD BE MADE THAT THE COLISEUM MAY BE WELL SITUATED RIGHT WHERE IT IS. SINCE IT IS UNLIKELY THAT IPFW, IVY TECH AND THE GLENBROOK RETAIL COMPLEX ARE GOING TO RELOCATE, PERHAPS AN ALTERNATE SOLUTION MIGHT BE TO COME UP WITH A METHOD OF INTERCONNECTING THIS NORTH SIDE COMPLEX, THE COLISEUM, AND IPFW WITH DOWNTOWN.

ONE POSSIBILITY THAT A NUMBER OF CITIES HAVE USED IS LITE RAIL – TO CONNECT THEIR DOWNTOWN WITH OTHER PARTS OF THE CITY OR THEIR AIRPORT. CINCINNATI, CHATTANOOGA AND PORTLAND, OREGON ALL COME TO MIND. A LITE RAIL LOOP THAT CONNECTED DOWNTOWN WITH GLENBROOK, THEN ALONG COLISEUM BOULEVARD TO THE COLISEUM, IPFW AND IVY TECH, AND THEN BACK TO DOWNTOWN ALONG THE ST. JOSEPH RIVER AND SPY RUN MIGHT BE WORTH LOOKING AT. COULD THIS BE A PROJECT FOR THE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT BOARD – WITH POSSIBLY A JUMPSTART FROM THE LEGACY FUND?

FINALLY, FORT WAYNE, AT VARIOUS PERIODS IN ITS HISTORY, THROUGH AGGRESSIVE LEADERSHIP HAS DONE THE RIGHT THING AT THE RIGHT TIME. (NOT ALWAYS – AS THE FAILURE OF THE FREEWAY REFERENDUM INDICATES.)

ONE OF THESE TIMES WAS OBVIOUSLY THE BUILDING OF THE COURT HOUSE, WHICH WAS CONSTRUCTED IN 1906. FORT WAYNE AT THE TIME HAD A POPULATION OF 80,000. ONE COURT ROOM WOULD HAVE BEEN ADEQUATE FOR MANY YEARS, BUT THE COMMISSIONERS AT THE TIME BUILT THE MAGNIFICENT BUILDING THAT WE HAVE NOW WITH FIVE COURT ROOMS, EACH DIFFERENTLY STYLED AND WITH WONDERFUL ARTWORK AND NOW ALL COMPLETELY USED AND IN A SHOWPIECE BUILDING. BUT IT HAS BEEN ONLY IN THE LAST 25 YEARS HAVE WE REALLY APPRECIATED THE GEM THAT WE HAVE IN THE COURT HOUSE, AND THE GREAT FORETHOUGHT THAT IT TOOK TO BUILD.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE COLISEUM AS A BUILDING THAT WOULD SERVE THE PUBLIC RATHER THAN JUST BE A MONUMENT TYPE OF MEMORIAL, WAS ANOTHER EXCELLENT DECISION. THINK OF THE MANY WAR MEMORIALS THAT ARE JUST MONUMENTS WITH NO OTHER USAGE. THE COMMUNITY LEADERS AND ELECTED OFFICIALS WHO CONCEIVED THE COLISEUM SHOWED AMAZING FORETHOUGHT FOR A BUILDING THAT HAS BEEN – AND CONTINUES TO BE MORE VALUABLE EVERY YEAR, AND NEVER CEASES TO AMAZE AS TO THE USAGE IT GETS – AND ALL THE THINGS THAT HAPPEN THERE EACH YEAR.