


 FACILITY
EXECUTIVE
OF THE
Year

2020



Facility Executive Of The Year 2020

A fast-paced facility operation is a great fit for Dennis Williams, Sr. VP of Operations and Asst. GM at Milwaukee's Fiserv Forum.

By Anne Cosgrove

At Fiserv Forum, the events that take place at the facility keep the facilities team busy year-round. Opened in August 2018 in downtown Milwaukee, WI, the building and its 30-acre Deer District brought a new and vibrant place for people to gather. As a hub of entertainment for the city and the region overall, the 730,000 square foot facility is the first new sports and entertainment arena in Wisconsin since 2002. With 200 events taking place on average annually, the facility is home of the NBA's Milwaukee Bucks. But beyond these headliners, concerts, family shows, Marquette men's basketball, and more fill the up to 18,000 seat arena.

In July 2020, the Democratic National Convention will take place here, and that is one of the tasks on the mind of Dennis Williams, senior vice president of operations and assistant general manager at Fiserv Forum. Having come on board here in 2017 focused on final construction and buildout from the operations standpoint, Williams then transitioned to overseeing operations and maintenance of the facility and the surrounding Deer District.

At 35, Williams has a front-facing job in many respects, but it's his attention to the behind-the-scenes tasks that are a basis for keeping things on track. "On the days without events, I'm often the most busy." He's referring to the work that goes into transi-

tioning between events and with some occurring back to back, it's a significant part. "It's exciting to do this work and everything that goes into the events," he says.

Williams oversees facility operations and maintenance and housekeeping operations, as well as arena operations and production department, including building conversions. With 34 full-time and several hundred part-time employees, he points to communication and organization as crucial to his work. Previously director of facilities at Soldier Field in Chicago where he started out as an intern, Williams has continued to hone his skills. He credits success with always having an open mind and a willingness to jump in where needed.

Managing diverse responsibilities and staff is a hallmark of facility management leadership, and Williams shares his approach in his current position: "You need to be extremely organized. Organization is critical in this job, especially with the number of facilities and events going on. Also, I established structure early on. I emphasize

structure to my department heads, so we have consistent communication and it's being funneled down in proper ways."

Built Smart Throughout

Featuring an active plaza space designed for year-round community use outside, Fiserv Forum was built to redefine world-class fan experience and highlight the communal nature of attending live entertainment. Founding partners of the project are BMO Harris Bank, Fiserv Inc., Froedtert & the Medical College of Wisconsin, Johnson Controls, and Miller Brewing Co.

Central to the vision of Fiserv Forum as the hub of entertainment in the region was the visitor experience. Beyond the traditional amenities found, the project team focused on the role of technology to elevate experiences. From 800 high-definition televisions throughout the building to free wi-fi and now a "beer button" to order drinks from one's seat, connectivity from a technology standpoint was paramount.

Smart building technology behind the scenes has also taken center stage for Williams and his colleagues. The technology throughout Fiserv Forum pursued a "future-proof" design that has delivered a unified, intelligent infrastructure that includes control of HVAC, building automation, security, lighting, fire protection,

and information technology. A significant piece of this infrastructure is a Metasys building automation system by Johnson Controls. The building operates the Metasys system for energy management, HVAC, lighting control, and security.

Engaged at the earliest stage of the process as technology contractor, Johnson Controls worked with the Bucks, Mortenson Construction, ICON Venue Group, and numerous subcontractors to furnish, install, and integrate state-of-the-art smart building solutions throughout the facility.

Williams points out that the evolution of automation and controls in building operations has been significant during his time in the profession. We have about 2,500 items being monitored through the Metasys system, and this provides us the ability to know how the equipment is working at any time. In a facility of this size, having the system provide this insight is huge."

Throughout the facility, the monitoring capabilities help elevate the service the operations staff delivers. As Williams points out, "To be able to monitor equipment and see how its functioning and how its operating is paramount. We can see if certain equipment is struggling or if it is operating at its peak performance."

The monitoring also helps to prevent disruptions or avoid disaster. "We have sen-

(Continued overleaf)



(Top) There are a variety of spaces for fans and visitors to gather in and around Fiserv Forum. (Middle) The 30-acre Deer District just outside the arena is the site of events throughout the year. (Bottom) Home of the Milwaukee Bucks, the arena seats close to 18,000 at home games.



DENNIS WILLIAMS

Senior Vice President of Operations and Assistant GM at Fiserv Forum

2020 WINNER PROFILE

PROJECT AT-A-GLANCE

Overview: *Oversee final construction, buildout, and opening of Fiserv Forum, and currently serves as senior vice president of operations and assistant GM*

Type of Facilities: *Entertainment arena and outdoor Deer District*

Square Footage: *730,000, plus surrounding 30-acre Deer District*

Annual Budget: *\$6 million for operations*



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sors in technology rooms,” shares Williams. “If there was a leak of any sort, those sensors would notify us and help us prevent damage to the equipment and those spaces.”

Focusing on energy management, Williams says, “The system allows me to hone in on 15-minute intervals... even five-minute intervals. That is just one example, but having that type of data available to me is significant.”

Labor savings and speed of service is where Williams and his team find benefits as well. “We can change settings from anywhere. This cuts down on labor. We don’t have to travel to the room that needs adjustments. It’s much easier and provides better outcomes.”

He adds, “Our CMMS system is also hugely important. It helps us stay on task and make sure preventive maintenance is being done. And that works with the monitoring done through the Metasys system.”

What Is Ahead

With Fiserv Forum slated as the site for the Democratic National Convention this year, Williams and his team are working with the DNC team by holding site visits and determining the coordination of resources.



Williams' team at Fiserv Forum includes (l to r) Dave Sherrill, vice president of arena operations; Logan Brettschneider, administrative assistant/scheduler; Williams; Todd Gamster, director of facilities; and Katelyn Griggs, director of event operations.

Sustainability was not neglected in this venture. The facility was awarded a LEED Silver Certification from the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) in April 2019—the first sports and entertainment venue in Wisconsin to earn LEED Silver.

“Fiserv Forum is a world-class arena in all aspects, including sustainability, and we are proud to announce our LEED Silver Certification on Earth Day,” said Fiserv Forum and Bucks President Peter Feigin at the time. “We take to heart our role as caretakers of the community, and initiatives like bird-friendly windows, the elimination of plastic straws, and low-flow toilets demonstrate our commitment to the environment

and the future of Milwaukee.”

The LEED design included a focus on the LEED rating system’s Bird Collision Deterrence credit (SSpc55), which was created in partnership with the American Bird Conservancy.

With the Milwaukee Bucks possibly headed to the playoffs this spring and the Democratic National Convention a certainty here in July, Williams and his staff are already planning the logistics of a busy couple of months. It’s something he thrives on and part of what makes his job a good fit. “The variety of events and the fast pace is a great thing. Everybody will be involved.” As Fiserv Forum continues to solidify its place in downtown Milwaukee, Williams will be there helping to lead the charge. ■

Project Information

Project Manager/Bucks Representative: ICON Venue Group. **Construction Manager:** Mortenson Construction. **Architects:** Populous (lead); Eppstein Uhen Architects; HNTB. **Mechanical Engineer:** M-E Engineers. **Structural Engineer:** HNTB; Walter P. Moore. **Building Automation System:** Metasys by Johnson Controls. **CMMS:** eMaint.



Cosgrove is Editor-in-Chief of Facility Executive magazine. Learn more about Fiserv Forum by visiting www.fiservforum.com. Would you like to nominate someone for next year’s award? Visit www.FacilityExecutive.com/FEY20201 to learn more. Do you have a comment? Share your thoughts in the Comments section of the online version of this article at FacilityExecutive.com. Or send an e-mail to the Editor at acosgrove@group.com.

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PHOTOS: (TOP) GARY DINGEN/MILWAUKEE BUCKS; (LEFT) FISERV FORUM