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InTents

The magazine for the tent-rental and special-event industries

VIP villages, museum galas, and haute couture:

exploring corporate events

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Bryant Park, the installation site for Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week, is located behind (and actually on top of) the New York Public Library in midtown Manhattan, between 40th and 42nd Streets and Fifth and Sixth Avenues. The park is managed by the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation (www.bryantpark.org).

Fashioned for a Week

The biggest names in clothing design converge twice each year in a fabric facility.

by Andrew Formichella

Editor's note: *The summer 2001 issue of InTents featured Barnum's Kaleidoscope tent ("The Circus in the Midst"), designed by FTL Happold and constructed in Manhattan's Bryant Park. Andrew Formichella, formerly a senior architect with FTL Happold, here chronicles the installation of a different project, managed by other firms, at the same site. The article previously appeared online at www.ArchitectureWeek.com.*

Twice a year since 1993, 7th on Sixth Inc. has organized corporate-sponsored fashion shows—currently running as "Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week"—in New York City. Naturally, much of the glamour and popular press coverage focuses on the celebrities, models and designers in attendance. Fashion spectacle aside, 7th on Sixth's project offers the special events industry a model of smart design, logistics, organization and sheer tenacity.

Using rented prefabricated building components, 7th on Sixth constructs a temporary facility consisting of four theaters, a sponsor showcase lobby, and numerous ancillary support spaces. The 65,000-square-foot facility is constructed in 12 days within midtown Manhattan's Bryant Park. While operational, the facility produces approximately 10 shows per day, handling roughly 20,000 people each day. The extensive production schedule runs for nine days.

A.Form Architecture pc performs architectural services for 7th on Sixth, a process that involves shifting, squeezing,

and growing them into their site. The location requires sensitivity to the existing classical stonework and architectural elements. In response, A.Form incorporated the Josephine Fountain as a major element in the lobby, while using the existing Sixth Avenue grand stair as the main entrance to the facility. The structures are arranged as to turn inward, creating pockets of egress points and mechanical equipment areas to help protect the existing ballustrades and prize flowerbeds. The park remains open to the public, as the front entry respects public access, while the facility shuts down only a portion of the public space.

The logistics on 40th Street, a busy Manhattan thoroughfare, are organized by well-timed street closures coordinated to a complex trucking schedule. The street security is part of a larger organizational structure created by 7th on Sixth, located in an adjacent 12-by-60-foot trailer, called The Command Center. The Command Center, under the leadership of executive producer Lynn Longendyke, provides the intellect of the operation. While many participants often relate the endeavor to a military operation, Lynn insists on the analogy of a well-choreographed ballet!

The installation schedule is based on a 24-hour work day. Each 12-hour shift follows a detailed, task-oriented schedule based on one hour intervals coordinated to trucking sequence. Multiple tractor trailer loads of materials are required to sup-



Model makeup prep behind the scenes during Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week.

ply the work crews at exact intervals during the day and night, which keeps the crews efficient in meeting the imposing show schedule and to keep New York traffic flowing smoothly.

The Command Center coordinates the activities of some 40 different vendors representing specific components of the Fashion Village. United Rentals Special Events, Frederick, Md., provides the primary architectural components such as the structural decking, the building enclosure, and ancillary items such as emergency exits stairs and ramps. Aggreko Event Services, Houston, provides the HVAC components of the Village.

Aggreko provides enough electrical power and mechanical air ventilation to comparatively support a 1.5 million-square-foot Manhattan office building. The equipment is shipped, strategically placed, and operational all within a six-day time frame. The master plan details not only exact equipment placement but also the specific wire runs and public ramp locations. It is a complex system of wiring that is usually installed at 2:00 a.m. Planning clarity and coordination produces the efficiency required by the Command Center.

United Rentals begins with the night shift, using powerful portable lights work lights, and the crew prepares the grass surface with plywood to create a consistent structural surface. Another crew lays a modular decking, consisting of a four-by-four-foot modular interlocking system leveled to a predetermined datum. As the decking proceeds, a well-choreographed

forklift concerto moves large concrete anchor blocks, and heating, cooling and electrical power distribution equipment. Placement is carefully coordinated with the spacing required for the emergency egress calculations and building anchorage points.

The actual building system used is a Losberger Maxiflex 82-foot-wide clearspan structure. The building system consists of aluminum of base plates, columns and beams, which form the frame to be clad with a vinyl-coated polyester fabric. The fabric attachment method is similar to maritime sailing masts.

On the decking and horizontal, the columns are attached to base plates and two beams form a rafter that is joined to the columns. A crane is strategically deployed to lift the frame sections into place, and a crew of 13 can erect the 39 frames in approximately 10 hours.

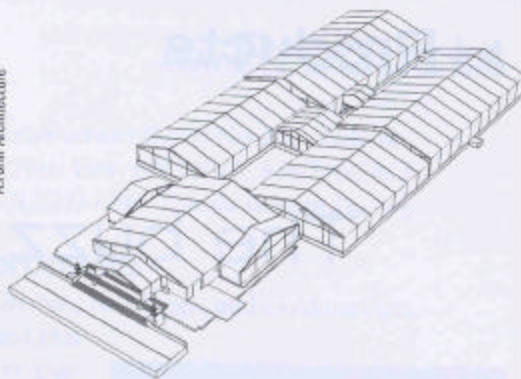
As the skeletal system is being completed, a separate crew begins the vinyl cladding installation. It's a matter of hours to skin the structures and enclose the village from the elements. Thereafter, the fine-tuning of the components take place, such as guttering for rain and snow protection, while the egress patterns are coordinated and established.

At this point of the installation, the construction process begins to transform into a theatrical production. It's fascinating to witness this transformation as the process shifts to the internal components such as the connecting stairs, seating risers, runways, platforms, prosceniums, technical support areas, storage, lighting and

About the Architects

A.Form Architecture pc offers clients a wide range of design services and opportunity. As part of a nationwide network of professionals, AFA builds design teams to suit clients' specific needs and location. By listening and fostering cooperation, they develop special event facilities to far exceed their initial expectations while staying within the strict guidelines of schedule and budget.

AFA's professional services encompass tensile structures, special events, as well as traditional architectural services. The BankBoston Music Facility pro-



Losberger US LLC, Mooresville, Ind., supplies Maxiflex clearspan structures for 7th on Sixth's facilities.

vide sound systems. The Command Center skillfully integrates these elements into a coherent building package.

After completion, the Village assumes its purpose, exhibiting the latest in fashion and fabrics. For some, however, the building's assembly is as spectacular as the fashion shows held inside. ▲

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vides an example of the firm's permanent tensile experience while the Nascar Digital Radio Touring Facility offers an example of its deployable structures. As architects for the 1998 NYC Goodwill Games, AFA further developed its temporary facility expertise.

Andrew Formichella graduated Pratt Institute School of Architecture in 1980 with an Outstanding Achievement in Design Award. Andrew founded A.Form Architecture in 1996 upon the completion of the AT&T Global Olympic Village structure in Atlanta.