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More than a game: Arlington business leaders talk Cowboys

BY O.K. CARTER

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Cowboys wouldn't seem to be a typical focus for the University of Texas at Arlington's annual Business Week event, but when those Cowboys represent the world's priciest sports franchise – and the planet's most glitzy new stadium – the dollars and sense of the topic become considerably more apparent.

UT-Arlington's College of Business and the Arlington Chamber of Commerce co-host Business Week, which begins March 9 and runs through March 13. Originally conceived more than 30 years ago as a way to bring high-profile business leaders to the campus to interact directly with students as a kind of living case study, the week has evolved into more of combined campus/community event.

“The idea is still to bring executives directly into regularly scheduled classrooms, but so long as space is available all the sessions are also open to the public,” said David Mack, assistant dean of the College of Business. “The theme this year is the Cowboys stadium and its impact on Arlington and the North Texas region.”

More than 24 speakers from a variety of affected industries will speak on campus during the week, but the highlight is an Executive Dinner, 7 p.m. March 10 at the Hereford University Center on campus, at which the keynote speaker will be Stephen Jones, CEO and executive vice president of the Dallas Cowboys.

Jones is not reluctant to tout the stadium, into which he notes that “the entire American Airlines Arena could fit.”

“With roof closed the entire Statue of Liberty could fit into the stadium,” Jones said.

There are other brags about the stadium as well, including its status incorporating the world's largest column-free room and the world's largest video screens.

The Cowboys and the city of Arlington view the facility as considerably more than just a sports venue, though some of those venues are impressive enough. Think Super Bowl, Cotton Bowl and NCAA Basketball Final Four as examples.

But there are other possibilities. The debut event this summer, for example, will feature a concert by country music star George Strait. The concert already has sold out, more than 80,000 tickets.

The stadium also is capable of hosting considerably smaller venues, sometimes several at the same time. For example, Arlington's largest social event is the Silver Spurs Gala, a fundraiser for the Cancer Research Foundation of North Texas. It typically brings in about 2,000 party goers, but organizers would like more. And higher visibility. So the gala will move its fall event to the stadium.

"The impact is clearly enormous," Mack said. "So we've asked our speakers this year to mostly focus on the stadium topic. Some of them will necessarily focus on other topics, like leadership or entrepreneurship, but the stadium is the general theme."

Arlington Chamber President Wes Jurey sees the stadium as what may well be the major economic event in the region of this decade.

"Business Week is really an exceptional opportunity to learn about the stadium impact, whether you're a student or just an interested person," Jurey said.

Here's a sample of speakers: Mark Penny, project executive for Manhattan Construction Company, whose topic is "Impacts of the Cowboys New Stadium Construction." Or Jeff Williams, president of Graham Associates, who will focus on the impact of the stadium on civil infrastructure. Or Arlington Deputy City Manager Trey Yelverton, who will deliver an economic impact analysis related to the stadium.

Other high profile speakers during the week include Ranger Aerospace CEO Steve Townes (Creating Jobs in the Middle of an Economic Meltdown) and Allyn & Co. Senior Vice President Bryan Mayes (The Public Campaign for the Dallas Cowboys Stadium).

A complete list of speakers, times and places is available at www.uta.edu/business. Some seating may also still be available for Executive Dinner with Stephen Jones as well.

"The emphasis of the week is clearly on business, but we're really trying to adopt a multi-disciplinary look at the stadium impact," Mack said. "This includes economic impact, transportation issues, workforce applications, implications for tie-ins by nonprofit charitable groups, leadership and entrepreneurial possibilities.

"It's really a big picture look at the impact of the stadium, a sort of living case study. It's a tremendous opportunity for our students to get a look at real world situations and, if people from outside the university are so inclined, to sit on some of the sessions. It's a real

opportunity as well for business community members to reacquaint themselves with a college atmosphere.”

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