

PHILIPS ARENA, HOME OF THE ATLANTA HAWKS



ARENA STATS

Location: Atlanta, Georgia

Began Construction: June 5, 1997

Opened: September 18, 1999

Seating Capacity: 18,729 (basketball) and 21,000 (concerts)

Owner: Atlanta-Fulton County Recreation Authority

Operator: Atlanta Spirit, LLC

Venue Uses: NBA/WNBA pro and collegiate basketball games, WWE wrestling matches, family shows, and a variety of concerts

Construction Cost: \$298 million (in 2012 dollars)

LEED Certification: Certified LEED for Existing Buildings:

Operations and Maintenance in April 2009

THE HAWKS' GREENING STORY: MOTIVATIONS, CHALLENGES AND LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

The Atlanta Hawks have a competitive green streak that came out when they vied with the Miami HEAT to become the first NBA team with a LEED-certified home arena. For eight months, the Hawks worked hard to achieve LEED Certification for Existing Buildings: Operations and Maintenance (EBOM), and the team was awarded the LEED certification on April 7, 2009, becoming the first NBA arena in the world to achieve this certification for an existing facility. Today, many NBA arenas have achieved LEED certification including the Miami HEAT, the Orlando Magic, Houston Rockets, and Portland Trail Blazers.

To earn certification the arena invested in a variety of green improvements almost a decade after the building first opened. These upgrades included: HVAC, chiller, and lighting retrofits; reflective roof materials that reduce cooling needs; and water conservation measures such as low-flow bathroom fixtures that have cut water usage by 2 million gallons.

WHY GO GREEN?

“The building was built with sustainable thoughts in mind as we’ve always been interested in the environment and our effect,” says Barry Henson, vice president of operations. However, Henson explains that as new technologies and building standards were being developed, the Hawks became increasingly interested in how they could further improve. “When we started talking about really getting involved and moving our position forward on greening our arena ownership, executives and marketing group were asking us what we could do better,” says Henson, “and that got us thinking about the next level of efficiency and improved operations.”

For the Hawks, greening was kicked off by two interests: maximizing operations efficiency, and competitiveness. The LEED green building certification intrigued the Hawks, particularly as it appealed to their desire to be the first arena to achieve LEED certification. “We spoke to other arenas but found no others going with LEED. LEED has gone through so many innovations and there are a lot of things that better fit an office building or school than a 24-hour operating arena like ours,” says Henson. “When we decided to pursue LEED certification it helped us blaze a few trails for the U.S. Green Building Council.”

WHERE TO START?

The Hawks operations team began by weighing the pros and cons of different greening initiatives and programs to assess which most fulfilled their primary objective of high operational efficiency. “We started by looking into areas such as carbon credits and buying renewable energy credits (RECs), but those are areas that people get involved in that don’t really change their operations or policies,” says Henson. “LEED was the only answer for us because it gave us the ability to document our policies, make changes where we needed to, and engage ourselves in the entire greening process.”

The Hawks brought together a core group of interested staff members from operations, event planning, and marketing to work with a local green building consultant called Southface. This green team led the charge on greening and LEED process, explains Henson, which ultimately also relied on feedback and buy-in from all staff. “Every employee in the arena had a role in changing how we do things, in assembling information and also in researching other greening initiatives out there. It was a total team effort here,” Henson emphasizes.

STANDOUT GREENING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ★ Low-flow flush toilets, aerator changes and low-flow shower heads as well as management of the cooling system reduced water consumption to save more than 1.95 million gallons of water per year.
- ★ Philips Arena electrical consumption has seen an 8 percent reduction year over year, saving more than 4.5 million kilowatt-hours per year. Philips Arena uses approximately 20 percent less energy than all other U.S. arenas that house two professional sports teams (Philips hosts both the Hawks and WNBA's Atlanta Dream).
- ★ Philips Arena sends its plastic, aluminum, glass, cardboard and paper waste to SP Recycling.
- ★ Philips Arena sends over 12 tons of food waste per year to be turned into compost that is sold and used locally.
- ★ Paper products, including paper towels, bathroom tissue, and copier paper, are all 100 percent post-consumer recycled content.

The Hawks began their on-the-ground work by implementing more environmentally conscious cleaning practices. “The first big change we made was moving towards green cleaning. That was a big change because everyone was used to using bleach, ammonia, and other chemicals,” says Henson. “We had training and staff integration in order for our green cleaning staff to get everyone on board. The chemical supplier that we started working with, Southeast Link, has what they call a ‘Green University.’ So they’ll bring a gentleman out who trains our staff as often as we need to make sure that everyone understands the proper operation of the greener equipment and products. They do training both onsite and at their headquarters.”

CHALLENGES: THOSE OVERCOME AND ONGOING

The Hawks looked to their peers for greening inspiration. When they were unable to find any LEED-certified arenas to use as a model, Henson's team worked on identifying individual greening projects that the Hawks could take on. “We just wanted to find out the greening initiatives at the other arenas. For example, composting was an initiative we pulled in from another arena,” explains Henson.

The Hawks also turned to both publically available resources and a local consultant for advice on which green products to use and how to upgrade their systems. “We have worked with the EPA on some of our initiatives and have used their online resources for guidance,” says Henson. “We

also worked with Southface on the LEED process, which was a big help to us. We went through some training at their headquarters on certifying buildings and green projects. They helped provide us with a lot of information on how to pursue LEED certification and we took a lot of cues from them from an operational standpoint.”

The Hawks had some challenges finding enough space to sort and manage their recyclables onsite, as well as initial local hauling issues. “From a waste diversion standpoint, we are on such a small footprint here that we had to get creative about how to handle those recycled materials and find a company that would accept our recyclables,” says Henson. “But we overcame those issues and increased our diversion rate from 5 percent to about 20 percent, if you include the compost diversion. That takes a lot of weight out of our compactors and really reduces our waste bill as well. It's good to be able to divert something and get it to a location where it can be reused.”

On the composting side, the Hawks had to work out how to best keep their composting facilities clean and sanitary for employees to manage. “Our composting program is active throughout our back of house. We started doing only the kitchens and food areas but we then expanded into all of our 90+ suites,” describes Henson. “These programs require a lot of meetings and a long refining process. We bought some equipment for cleaning the food receptacles. You have to clean those out daily. We've worked through those pains and now it's a pretty seamless process.”

Since 2008 the Hawks have also been implementing green strategies to increase their energy savings. “We've been working on our power consumption for several years now,” says Henson. “In 2008 we reduced our energy consumption enough to power 1,300 average American homes for a month.”

The Hawks' system-wide approach to energy reduction focuses predominantly on commissioning, automated lighting, lighting upgrades and sensors, according to Henson. “Our energy savings are mainly attributable to building commissioning, with new checks and balances of our systems,” he explains. “We had our airflow tested to ensure the systems were performing as designed and cut back use where possible. We looked at reducing lighting needs, have done some retrofits and also put some things on an automatic shut down. We put light sensors in offices. We were able to reduce the wattage of the fluorescent lamps from 34 watts to 25, with the same light effect throughout the facility.”

Henson's team compared Philips Arena with similar venues nationwide to best evaluate their overall energy savings. “When we were moving through the LEED certification process, we were able to benchmark ourselves against other arenas,” Henson explains. “We approached arenas that have a similar climate and events schedule. We tracked 21 percent better than any other building that we talked to in the country in terms of energy use. Additionally, our concert attendance is ranked third in the nation, which makes our energy savings metrics even more impressive.”

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On the other hand, the Hawks recognize that there is always room for improvement and meet regularly to plan their next projects. “We still have meetings to look at new products and procedures,” says Henson. “The thing about LEED is that once you get certified everybody calls you with new products which we evaluate based on payback and efficiency. We separate out the projects we want to entertain for future capital expenditure as well as the cost-neutral things that we can change now.”

In order to evaluate new products, the Hawks conduct internal research and also solicit advice from partners. “We’ll look through new products to determine if they’re legit. We talk to the typical user of a product to get their evaluation of it,” says Henson. “I also call Southface often and ask them if they’ve heard of the product or seen it in action anywhere, because they are a great resource for us. We get to the right people to make our decisions and count heavily on the partners who are closest to us in the process.”

Up next for the Hawks: a rainwater cistern and 100 percent chemical-free cleaning. “We are working on a couple of water-saving initiatives wherein we collect rainwater, as well as condensation, from our building and use that in our cooling towers instead of using city water. That’s one piece that we are actively working on, but it’s still in its infancy right now,” described Henson. “There are some alternate cleaning initiatives that are looking very enticing as well, which would keep us from using any chemicals whatsoever. We’ve found a company that makes a product that is both a sanitizer and cleaning agent. You can use it in any spray bottle or cleaning infrastructure that you already have and it eliminates the need for cleaning chemicals of any kind.”

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

PARTNER WITH SPONSORS ON GREEN INITIATIVES: The Hawks have harnessed the green initiatives of numerous local companies in order to enhance and grow existing corporate partnerships and fashion a large percentage of their own employee volunteer projects on community donation drives and reforestation projects.

PARTNER WITH LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS TO GROW YOUR COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS: “We’ve formed a tight relationship with Habitat for Humanity and with the Atlanta Mission. A lot of the things that we no longer use here are reusable so we try to donate to those two entities as much as possible because it helps take care of Atlanta locally,” says Henson. “It has been a benefit for us to get involved in nonprofit groups that are taking care of our local people, often also our fans.” The Hawks also participate in Rock and Wrap it Up!, a widely used food donation program. “The group comes and picks up the prepared leftover food; we only have to collect it and get it to a central location,” explains Henson. “We try to help as much as we can locally. Many of these issues, environmental and social, should carry over into peoples’ home lives. We try to help educate fans, friends and other family members.”

PROVIDE DIRECT INCENTIVES TO ENGAGE STAFF IN GREEN ACTIONS: “We are connected to a MARTA [Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority] rail station so we regularly encourage our workers to ride the train. We give them train and bus passes as a perk to encourage them not to drive,” explains Henson. “Access to mass transit is a big help as we were able to cut down on our amount of parking as part of our LEED certification.”

REPEAT TRAININGS TO EDUCATE BOTH PERMANENT AND TRANSIENT STAFF: “Our type of training programs are really about re-introducing the same idea over and over until our staff takes hold of it. Once they do then they start introducing it to other people,” says Henson. “We have so many third-party people working in our building at all times, which can make it difficult to educate everyone. But because the part-time employees are in constant contact with members of our staff, our messages get to those people as well.”