

# HOW SUITE IT IS

CORPORATE ENTERTAINMENT IS ALWAYS EVOLVING,  
BUT THE EXECUTIVE BOX AT THE LOCAL ARENA IS AS POPULAR AS EVER



**W**ith a well-stocked bar, snacks on demand, housekeeping, security and built-in entertainment – not to mention a captive audience – the skybox seems the ultimate venue for mixing business and pleasure. Impress your clients, relax and unwind, chat and laugh... and sign on the dotted line?

Doing business at “The Game” may seem a little old school, and Atlantic Canada’s executive suites don’t quite have the cachet of high-end boxes overlooking the SuperBowl or even the losing Leafs, but our hockey teams, sporting events and concerts do draw a loyal crowd – including those wearing suits. Even in these trying economic times, with corporate entertainment budgets being rolled back across the board, it appears that the “corporate box” is still considered a worthy investment.

“There have been some adjustments to the way people are spending, but there is still a need to entertain clients; a booth at a game is still a pretty big deal,” says Geoff Hurst, manager of corporate services at the Halifax Metro Centre.

As the go-to guy for premium seating in Halifax Regional Municipality, Hurst has experienced his fair share of skyboxes and luxury suites during his business travels. He mentions one particularly luxurious offering in Dallas, complete with leopard-print couches and a range of refreshments to rival a cocktail lounge. “It was the kind of place one very wealthy person might own and use to entertain friends,” he says.

That doesn’t really happen in Halifax, he admits. While almost every skybox has been customized in some way, the personal touches arrive through art selection rather than flamboyant furniture. It’s corporate and fairly conservative – and that’s exactly what the suites are for. Although there will always be guests who show up purely for the “free” beer, those

who lease these exclusive boxes have made a serious investment. Whatever’s happening on the floor below, be it the Halifax Mooseheads or Guns ‘n’ Roses, is not always the main attraction.

“The event is just the excuse. There could be a darts tournament going on... it’s just (an excuse) to get the client there to talk to them and show them a good time. There’s tons of business done in the boxes. Millions and millions of dollars in deals have been done here,” reports Hurst.

The Metro Centre is probably the top of the skybox crop in Atlantic Canada, with 49 executive suites, costing between \$36,000 and \$75,000 a year, depending on size. But it’s hardly alone: the Charlottetown Civic Centre added 10 luxury suites in 2003 (each costs about \$12,500 per PEI Rocket hockey season) and the Saint John Harbour Station added 15 executive boxes (closer to \$30,000 each) less than five years ago. Mile One Centre in St. John’s and the Moncton Coliseum also boast high-end corporate boxes. Every suite available has been leased, and in most cases, the facilities report a waiting list.

“It’s definitely a business tool,” says Stu Dunn, operations manager of the Charlottetown Civic Centre. “The owners are all fairly solid companies with big clients.”

“There’s a fair number of big clients who are entertained (in the boxes),” echoes Michael Caddell, general manager of the Harbour Station. “There’s a fair bit of socializing going on.”

Hillcrest Volkswagen in Halifax has leased one of the largest executive suites in the Metro Centre for seven years. “It’s a way to reward staff members, for team-building, to entertain existing clients... and we do use the suite for charities, too,” says Hillcrest GM Mike Velemirovich. “And that’s partly altruism, but it’s also good for our image.”

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‘After Hours’ is a new department dedicated to executive leisure time. Stay tuned as I explore everything from the best golf courses to the most boisterous Happy Hours. If you have suggestions for activities you’d like me to cover in future issues, send them to: [stephporter@hotmail.com](mailto:stephporter@hotmail.com)

One early hint to pass along: if you’re looking for creative ways to amuse and impress your clients, don’t head to the Internet and search “executive entertainment.” Trust me – the word “corporate” will get you more appropriate, if tamer, results. S.P.