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## Arena is developer's only priority

By MIKE WIGGINS  
The Daily Sentinel

Saturday, April 26, 2008

Two months after setting the Grand Valley abuzz by announcing a plan to build a civic arena near downtown Grand Junction, local business owner and commercial developer Reed Mitchell is busy putting his words into action.

He traveled to the Front Range this month to tour an events center and market his project. He is negotiating with hockey's minor leagues, trying to bring a team to the arena. He says investors — whom he won't identify — are lining up to fund a facility he insists won't cost any public dollars to build. And he is confident he will obtain a U.S. Department of Agriculture loan guarantee that will cover a majority of the estimated \$35 million price tag.

"I'm busy all day, every day with this," Mitchell said. "This is all I do."

Mitchell toured the Broomfield Event Center for two hours, learning from the owner and developer of the facility about everything from the design and amenities to the types of events it hosts. Built in 2006, the 180,000-square-foot, 6,000-seat center hosts professional minor-league hockey and basketball teams. The center also hosts 12 to 15 concerts and 20 to 25 special events a year, including circuses, rodeos, truck races, skating shows and conventions, according to its Web site.

Mitchell has similar events in mind for his proposed Riverside Arena, which could be 141,000 square feet and seat 5,000 people. He said he has spoken with representatives from the East Coast and Central hockey leagues, both of which are minor-league affiliates of the National

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Hockey League, and plans to speak with a minor-league basketball league and an indoor football league.

The Rocky Mountain News reported earlier this month that the 2-year-old Broomfield Event Center, which is owned by the city and county of Broomfield, has had trouble filling seats and endured management upheaval in a crowded sports and entertainment market.

Mitchell said Grand Junction wouldn't have the problem of competition. Because the city is a regional hub for western Colorado and eastern Utah with no nearby competition, he said, it can draw enough spectators to support the arena.

"Look at how they support JUCO (the Junior College World Series)," Mitchell said. "This is a good community for that kind of stuff."

He thinks it's simply a matter of time before a local community capitalizes on an untapped market.

"If we don't do it, Montrose or Rifle or somebody else will, so we're going to do it," he said.

The owner of Award Realty in Grand Junction has asked the city to lease roughly a third of the 66-acre Jarvis property between Fifth Street and Riverside for the civic arena. He and Mesa County administrators are discussing the possibility of relocating there some of the events traditionally held at the Mesa County Fairgrounds on Orchard Mesa.

The county and Mitchell are teaming together on a feasibility study of both the county fairgrounds and the civic arena. The study will look at everything from services and facilities that should be offered by the public and private sectors, to the civic arena's footprint on the Jarvis property, to the financial prospects of the fairgrounds and arena. The county has applied for a \$70,000 USDA grant to pay for the study, which should be completed in late June or early July, County Administrator Jon Peacock said.

County officials, meanwhile, will visit the Broomfield Event Center and the Larimer County Fairgrounds and Events Complex on May 5.

Mitchell hopes to pay for the bulk of the project with a \$25 million USDA loan guarantee.

U.S. Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., and Rep. John Salazar, D-Colo., have written letters to the USDA endorsing the arena. Mitchell said he has spoken with several banks about using the loan guarantee, which can lead to lower interest rates, to finance the project.

"We are extremely confident that that will work out for us," he said of obtaining the loan guarantee.

Mitchell also is in talks with investors who could foot the balance of the project. He declined to identify potential partners but suggested that the energy industry could play a role.

"I haven't decided who I'm going to work with yet," he said.

Mitchell acknowledged there is a lot of work to be done if the civic arena is to fulfill his goal of breaking ground next year. But he is bold in his belief about what the facility would mean to the Grand Valley.

"Everyone in this community will say, 'How did we live without this?'" he said.

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E-mail Mike Wiggins at [mwiggins@gjds.com](mailto:mwiggins@gjds.com).

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By Rich

Apr 28, 2008 8:15 AM | [Link to this](#)

Why don't they use the fair grounds on Orchard Mesa for this Events Center? Highway 50 would better than the Park way. Everything can't be DOWN TOWN. It is still Mesa County out there isn't it?

By SueLynn

Apr 28, 2008 7:31 AM | [Link to this](#)

No taxpayer dollars?

**"He says investors ý whom he won't identify ý are lining up to fund a facility he insists won't cost any public dollars to build. And he is confident he will obtain a U.S. Department of Agriculture loan guarantee that will cover a majority of the estimated \$35 million price tag."**

If he defaults, it IS taxpayer dollars to bail him out.

**"Mitchell toured the Broomfield Event Center for two hours"**

Learned everything there is to know in 2 hours?

**"The Rocky Mountain News reported earlier this month that the 2-year-old Broomfield Event Center, which is owned by the city and county of Broomfield, has had trouble filling seats and endured management upheaval in a crowded sports and entertainment market."**

Did he miss this part?

**"ýLook at how they support JUCO (the Junior College World Series),ý Mitchell said. ýThis is a good community for that kind of stuff.ý"**

That's college sports, an entirely different ball game from what he wants to present. And the ticket prices are reasonable, and there is no "free market" profit involved other than the assorted vendors selling popcorn, etc.

**"County officials, meanwhile, will visit the Broomfield Event Center and the Larimer County Fairgrounds and Events Complex on May 5."**

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At their own expense, Mitchells expense, or the taxpayers of Mesa Countys expense?

**"U.S. Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., and Rep. John Salazar, D-Colo., have written letters to the USDA endorsing the arena. Mitchell said he has spoken with several banks about using the loan guarantee, which can lead to lower interest rates, to finance the project."**

I want lower interest rates where if I default, the taxpayers pick up the tab and I walk free and clear.  
Where do I sign up?

By David Crosby

Apr 27, 2008 4:15 AM | [Link to this](#)

About time. GJ needs a mid sized facility before anyone can make sense of promoting top flight events. Put up or shut up. Maybe something besides softball and mountain biking can grab some attention. Semi-pro basketball may be a stretch. Junction needs more problems anyway. This will just take everyones minds off the real ones.

By joe

Apr 27, 2008 12:30 AM | [Link to this](#)

Why would Mesa County want to do this? Move events to an area that is going to be so congested with traffic it be dangerous to bring a truck-trailer rig. Duh do they really think that little two lane they are putting thru there is going to help the present traffic. some parkway!

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