

Veterans Auditorium gets new name: Community Choice Credit Union Convention Center

A 10-year, \$2.5 million deal will give Community Choice Credit Union naming rights at the newly renovated Veterans Memorial Auditorium in Des Moines, officials announced today.

Veterans, which is in the midst of a \$42.8 million renovation, will be called “Community Choice Credit Union Convention Center” when it opens next month. The tag “Honoring Veterans Since 1955” will be included in the new name. The building will also bear the name Veterans Memorial Hall.

Officials from Polk County, Global Spectrum — the private firm that manages the Iowa Events Center — and Community Choice made the announcement during a Thursday morning news conference.

Money from the Community Choice deal will be used to help finance the operations and maintenance of the new convention facility, reducing the likelihood that Polk County would have to provide any subsidies in the future.

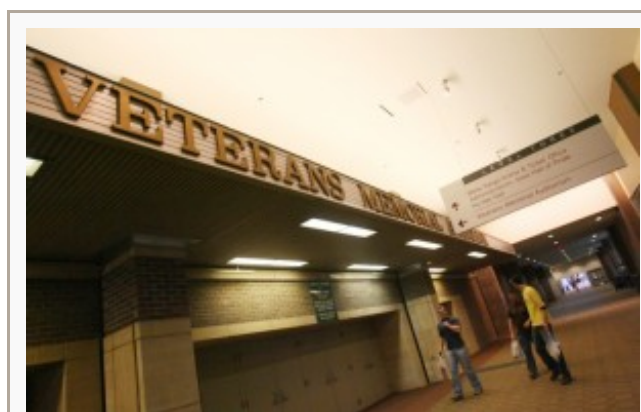


Photo taken March 6, 2009: The old Veterans Memorial Auditorium sign was incorporated into the new walk way between Vets and Hy-Vee Hall. (Andrea Melendez/Register file photo)

The Iowa Events Center is comprised of Wells Fargo Arena, Hy-Vee Hall, Veterans Memorial Auditorium and the Polk County Convention Complex. The “Plex” will be retired after the new Veterans opens next month.

The venerable auditorium, which was one of the largest arenas and exhibit halls in the country when it opened on Feb. 1, 1955, was named to honor Polk County World War II veterans.

It was the area’s primary venue for sporting events and concerts until construction of Wells Fargo Arena, the centerpiece of the \$218 million Iowa Events Center complex, of which Veterans Auditorium is a part. The events center opened in 2005.

The entire building will be known as Community Choice Credit Union Convention Center but that the building will include a designated area for veterans, said Chris Connolly, the Iowa Events Center’s general manager

Veterans Memorial Hall – a lobby-like area covering slightly more than 5,000 square feet inside the western door of the building – will be open every day between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. for the public to view artwork and eight kiosks with information about the war service of Iowans, Connolly said.

Veteran’s Memorial Auditorium also will remain on the outside of the building.

The 18-month renovation project at Veterans aims to make Des Moines a bigger draw for state, regional and national events and conventions.

“It will greatly enhance the profile of the Iowa Events Center — that’s both on a regional and national level,” Connolly said. “We also feel like it will attract a lot more convention business to Des Moines.”

New exterior signs are expected to go on the side of Veterans auditorium in February, he said. Careful consideration

was given to preserving the building's history of paying tribute to veterans, he added.

"That component is still there — the veterans piece," he said.

The new Veterans Memorial Hall will pay tribute to war veterans in a variety of ways, including artwork and eight kiosks that honor the war service of Iowans.

"When the Board of Supervisors made the commitment last year to move forward with renovating this facility, we made it our first priority to continue to preserve the memories that we all have, as well as honor the importance of Iowa's veterans," Polk County Supervisor Angela Connolly said.

A \$25,000 donation also was made to the Des Moines Vets Center on behalf of Polk County, Global Spectrum and Community Choice Credit Union. The Des Moines Vets Center offers a variety of community-based mental health counseling and readjustment services. The program was developed in 1979; the center's doors opened a year later.

"We pride ourselves in welcoming home war veterans," Katina Mach of the Des Moines Vets Center said.

Community Choice Credit Union officials were approached about the naming rights by Global Spectrum and Front Row Marketing Services, the commercial rights firm that "holds the rights to sell naming rights, sponsorships, advertising and premium seating at the Iowa Events Center," according to a news release.

"This opportunity assures that the support of our veterans would not be lost, but would actually be enhanced as the complex has been redesigned with tributes to veterans that will be showcased within the new Veterans Memorial Hall," Roger Reiser, CEO of Community Choice Credit Union said.

The deal with Community Choice is similar to other agreements reached with the West Des Moines supermarket chain Hy-Vee Foods and Wells Fargo Bank.

The 20-year deal for Hy-Vee Hall's naming rights is worth \$8.025 million. That agreement was reached in 2001.

The deal with Wells Fargo is worth \$11.5 million over 20 years.

The renovated Veterans auditorium is scheduled for completion on Jan. 3. The first event at the new facility — a bridal show — will be held on Jan. 7, Chris Connolly said. "It is on time and things are looking great," he said.

A public open house will be held on Jan. 9.

Central Iowa-based Community Choice Credit Union has locations in Altoona, Ankeny, Clive, Des Moines and Johnston. The not-for-profit financial cooperative was founded in 1953 and was originally called State Employees Community Credit Union. The name was changed to Community Choice in June 2000.

This post includes reporting from Register Staff Writer Jeff Eckhoff

Read Friday's Des Moines Register for more details.

What do you think of the new name for Veterans Auditorium?